

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS

IN JAMAICA:

A CASE STUDY OF CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY'S PASTORS

IN ST. CATHERINE EAST, JAMAICA

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CARICOM	Caribbean Community & Common Market
CBI	Caribbean Basin Initiative
CCJ	Caribbean Court of Justice
CGP	Church of God of Prophecy
COGOP	Church of God of Prophecy
CPMA	Church of Prophecy Markers Association
JAFGC	Jamaica Association of Full Gospel Churches
JUGC	Jamaica Umbrella Group of Churches
NAE	National Association of Evangelicals
PCCNA	Pentecostal Charismatic Churches of North America
PFNA	Pentecostal Fellowship of North America

## ABSTRACT

As of 2018, I have spent the last nineteen years serving as pastor in the Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP); I have been a member since 1983 and have served in various other capacities in the church. My years of service and experience have given me a vantage point to observe many of the challenges and opportunities facing the denomination. However, as my knowledge and experience increase, I sense a greater need, not only to see and talk but also to act.

One of the areas of challenge I have observed is the church's historically weak ecumenical relationships. Many of the pastors with whom I serve in Jamaica demonstrate a chronic unwillingness to engage in meaningful ecumenical relationships. This is also the ethos of the national church, which, although it has existed on the Island (Jamaica) for more than nine decades and has more than three hundred congregations, is relatively unknown nationally. This is partly because the church has refused to be meaningfully involved in ecumenical relationships over the years.

I therefore consider ecumenism an important subject to investigate. This is so as the church is continually left out of important events and dialogues while other churches are consistently consulted by the Jamaican government. My intention therefore is to examine the possible cause or causes for this kind of low engagement by the church and to determine what steps the church must take to leverage its latent strength in Jamaica. As the parish overseer for the church in St. Catherine East, I will use this cohort of pastors as a sample for this research. However, my hope is that the research may also benefit the larger Christian community.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### **Ecumenism**

As the universal church prepares itself to tackle changing global socioeconomic and geopolitical conditions, the argument of ecumenical relationships is one that it must continue to consider. At a time when many of the world's systems are devising ways of uniting to tackle social ills such as poverty, hunger, and terrorism, the church and its leaders cannot operate in silos and expect to affect their world. When I speak of ecumenical relations, I am not here referring to interfaith but rather intrafaith relationships. I am not suggesting that there is no value in interfaith relationships; however, that is not the objective of this study. Instead, the intention of this thesis-project is to highlight the challenges faced by Pentecostal pastors, particularly within the Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP) in relation to ecumenical relationships.

I consider ecumenical relationship an important subject for reflection given the urgent need for the church to respond to the increasing social ills impacting their communities. It is also of dire importance as a demonstration of their Christian witness to an increasingly unbelieving world. According to Walter Elwell, ecumenism is “the organized approach to bring about the cooperation and unity of all believers.”<sup>1</sup> The 1974 Lausanne Conference recognized that the church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose. The question was asked in that conference, “How can the church declare a gospel of

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<sup>1</sup> T. P. Weber, “Ecumenism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 363.

peace to the world, while remaining fragmented and un-reconciled itself?”<sup>2</sup> Therefore the COGOP must play its role in building ecumenical relationships.

### **The Genesis of the Church of God (of Prophecy)**

The roots of the COGOP were established in the Christian Union, which was formed in August 1886, and the Holiness Church of Camp Creek, which was organized in May 1902. According to church historian C. T. Davidson, Ambrose J. Tomlinson was invited to a special meeting by the Holiness Church at Camp Creek on June 13, 1903, where they were studying God’s words. For Tomlinson, this meeting was pivotal in searching the Bible to see if they could find the church of God just as David said he would find it.<sup>3</sup> Davidson states that on June 13, 1903, while in prayer and solitude on Burger Mountain, Tomlinson had a revelation of the true church. This experience of Tomlinson greatly influenced the little movement and changed it forever.

After becoming a member of what now became the Church of God, Tomlinson was chosen as its pastor. Therefore, according to Davidson, “right there in W. F. Bryant’s home, at the base of Burger Mountain, Cherokee County, North Carolina, on Saturday June 13, 1903, the Church of God of the Bible, the continuation of the Early Church as designated in the scriptures, was declared to be in existence and functioning.”<sup>4</sup> For this early group, this meant that the church had now emerged from its state of apostasy, which was caused by adapting to manmade creeds which essentially denied the church of the

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<sup>2</sup> Weber, “Evangelicals and Ecumenism,” 365.

<sup>3</sup> C. T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1973), 312.

<sup>4</sup> Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 315.

Spirit's power.<sup>5</sup> This belief generally gave the young church the freedom to be what they believed God wanted the church to be, which to them was not what was happening in the other churches at the time.

### **The Exclusive Church of God of Prophecy**

Tomlinson's new church was encouraged by their first annual assembly; for them this was the opportunity to relinquish the trappings of the old religion and to adapt to being the "Church of God." Davidson reports that many of the members of the new church felt pushed aside by "their church associates and some of them suffered unwarranted invectives and persecution" which emanated from previous church members.<sup>6</sup> Davidson asserts that these things, along with the newfound freedom, encouraged the separation of the new church from the established religious order. "Their earnestness, their integrity and zealous efforts, along with the revelation of the true church of the Bible, whose tenets and dogma they sought to ardently promote seemed to set them aside as an exclusive group—different to most other church organizations."<sup>7</sup>

This practice of segregation offended other Christians. H.D. Hunter reports that "one of the restorationist impulses of the CGP [COGOP] has been an exclusive body ecclesiology."<sup>8</sup> This has infuriated and offended other Christians, yet it was that part of their doctrine which made them feel their spirituality was superior to that of other Christians. Tomlinson warned members to be careful of their association with the "common churches." He stated that "officers and members should act very cautious, and

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<sup>5</sup> H. D. Hunter, "Church of God of Prophecy," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Ed van der Maas, rev. expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 540-41.

<sup>6</sup> Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 334.

<sup>7</sup> Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 334.

<sup>8</sup> Hunter, "Church of God of Prophecy," 540.

seek for the use of great wisdom, lest her visage should be marred, and she be wounded in the house of her friends.” He cautioned that “the overseers, deacons, and entire membership should not pattern after the same order of other churches . . .”<sup>9</sup>

In advancing their exclusivist agenda, the COGOP institutionalized the concept by establishing the “Church of Prophecy Markers Association, CPMA” in the General Assembly of 1941.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of the Church’s marking program, which it claimed was appointed by God, was “to identify and make known the story of the Church.”<sup>11</sup> In this doctrine of the church it continued by asserting that the CPMA was also “making known the Church to the other sheep so that they may be gathered in the fold,”<sup>12</sup> which was the COGOP. This excerpt from the Bible Training Institute manual represents the official curriculum used by the church in educating both members and leaders in the past. In addition to the idea of being the true church, the COGOP saw itself as having an international reach which the CPMA was designed to assist in fulfilling.

The CPMA was instrumental in the exaltation of the COGOP, in that it gave the members an added sense of self-importance, while at the same time disregarding others. According to Hunter, this made those outside the organization view them as self-indulgent while the members thought that they were glorifying Jesus. This ecclesiology, Hunter writes, has also prevented the organization from joining the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) or the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA).<sup>13</sup> In this regard, although the COGOP has attained some status and recognition, the organization

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<sup>9</sup> A. J. Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, vol. 1 of The Church of God Movement Heritage Series (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 2011), 98.

<sup>10</sup> *General Assembly Addresses 1928–1943* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1976), 371-76.

<sup>11</sup> *Lessons in Bible Training*, vol. 2 (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1969), 322.

<sup>12</sup> *Lessons in Bible Training*, vol. 2, 322.

<sup>13</sup> Hunter, “Church of God of Prophecy,” 541.

has not progressed as have many of its counterparts. This may also be due to the lack of emphasis in some areas where the church continues to show signs of weakness and retardation such as in clergy education. I believe that the COGOP's approach has therefore impacted its relatively low growth as well as its inability to keep or attract more people who are highly educated and critical thinkers to its leadership ranks.

### **The Church of God of Prophecy Shows Signs of Change**

Within the past four decades, however, the COGOP has shown signs of changing from 1972 when they began to participate in the Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogue. In 1984 the church declared that the Holy Spirit called it to repentance from a self-indulgent state. However, this call appeared not to have been heeded until a decade later, when, according to Adrian Varlack Sr., Billy Murray redirected the church toward the harvest. This new thrust has placed the church inevitably in the path to work with other denominations and entities. This is indicated in the declaration by the church that it is “working hand-in-hand to share God’s love and a message of hope to the brokenhearted.”<sup>14</sup> Although the statement does not explicitly state that this means in an ecumenical sense, stating that they see themselves as a “church-planting Movement with a passion for Christian union.”<sup>15</sup> This statement gives the impression of ecumenism by the COGOP.

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<sup>14</sup> Church of God of Prophecy, “About,” accessed May 29, 2017, <http://cogop.org/about/>.

<sup>15</sup> Church of God of Prophecy, “Vision 202,” accessed May 29, 2017, <http://cogop.org/about/vision2020/>.

Furthermore, in its 2012 *Ministry Policy Manual*, the church states that it believes “in the oneness and ultimate unity of believers for which our Lord prayed.”<sup>16</sup> This is demonstrated by a paradigm shift evidenced by the church being “a founding member of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA)” and has participated in different umbrella organizations as a demonstration of a shift toward inclusivism.<sup>17</sup> In addition to participating in these organizations, the church has in recent years welcomed ministers from different denominations during its International Assembly. These include the General Overseer of the Church of God, Cleveland, in 2014 as well as Jack Hayford from the Four Square Gospel in 2010, to name two.

The denomination has moved even further to form a consortium with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and the Pentecostal theological seminary (PTS) in the United States for the training of its leaders. These affiliations have inevitably brought many of the church’s leaders into contact with other leaders in a more intimate way, as just a few of the professors are members of the COGOP. This level of theological interaction has expanded the worldview of the participants and has positioned them to be of greater influence both in their own denomination and in the wider church community. However, it must be noted that participation in these training activities is still very low and does not include a great number of the more senior leaders of the church.

It is therefore important to point out at this time that the church’s shift to inclusivism was not met with applause from all the members; some left the church in protest. There are still members of the church who continue to hold to elements of exclusivism, though it is not always easily discerned. The COGOP’s assertion which

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<sup>16</sup> Church of God of Prophecy, *Ministry Policy Manual* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 2012), 186.

<sup>17</sup> Hunter, “Church of God of Prophecy,” 541.



suggests that they have a unique place among the myriad of denominations and independent churches may be an effort to appease their diehard members. For, according to Varlack, although the church continues to learn from others in the kingdom, its “legitimacy is because of God’s choosing and our covenant commitment to be like the church we see in the New Testament, the Church for which Jesus Christ Himself is both Head and Savior.”<sup>18</sup> This declaration of the COGOP leaves the organization to grapple with how it must influence its leaders to take an ecumenical approach in their national and individual contexts, since many of those now leading have not been exposed to the beliefs and practices of other Christians.

### **The Church of God of Prophecy, Jamaica, Context**

In April 2017, the COGOP in Jamaica held its seventy-fifth biennial national convention, this because the church no longer has an annual national convention. The national convention is the highest spiritual gathering for the denomination, attracting thousands of worshippers and well-wishers. The national convention bears some resemblance to the International General Assembly of the church, which is held in the United States of America. Of note is that in 2018 the church will celebrate its one hundredth general assembly. These are significant gatherings for the COGOP, as conventions are where church rules and policies are laid down, appointments are made, and the respective overseer gives his address to the church. Jamaica’s convention, which currently runs for six days, morning until night, also signifies the marking of milestones in the life the church. The national convention features the various ministries of the

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<sup>18</sup>Adrian L. Varlack Sr., *Foundation Church of God of Prophecy: Concise History, Polity, Doctrine, and Future*, Foundations (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 2010), 113.

church, the parading of the parishes, and ecstatic preaching and music throughout each day.

While this was not historically widespread, the church locally, like its international body, has been receiving visiting ministers in the convention. This is also true of the local churches, retreats, conferences, camps, and other church-related gatherings. Many of their members, including a few of their pastors, have also attended the Jamaica Theological Seminary, which is an affiliate of the missionary churches in Jamaica. Their members are also attending other Bible schools with a lesser degree of recognition and are obtaining exposure to other church practices. This new and emerging ethos of the COGOP is appearing to be the norm, yet the reciprocal relationship is very limited and in some cases nonexistent. For instance, in the seventy-fifth convention there was no official visitor in the main convention from any other denomination.

While the absence of other church leaders from their convention may be due to a historical bias by the COGOP toward them, since the COGOP has significantly changed the way they view other Christians, such an assumption can hardly be the reason. However, the fact that the Jamaican COGOP has remained an insular organization may contribute to others being unaware of the church's shift towards a more ecumenical approach. Pastors in Jamaica therefore appear to be playing catch up with other Pentecostal leaders who are more impactful in the society. Therefore, although the COGOP's footprints have been in Jamaica for over nine decades, and based upon the most recent National Census it is now among the larger denominations in the country, it has much work to do to demonstrate its National presence and worth.<sup>19</sup> I use the term

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<sup>19</sup> "Population and Housing Census 2011," *Jamaica General Report*, vol.1, Statistical Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica, 80.

*national* because the church is more respected at the local level, a fact that is demonstrated by its following.

According to the 2011 census report, the COGOP has approximately 121,400 affiliates, making it among the top five denominations in Jamaica.<sup>20</sup> The church operates a central administrative office in Kingston known as the National Office. Apart from the national conventions, the various parishes host their own conventions during the year when the national convention is not held. As it relates to covenanted members, the church reports that it has more than 40,000 people. They further report that they have 302 local churches situated in all parishes, and approximately 305 pastors and associate pastors. However, with such comparatively large following the church is not widely known and recognized in the national dialogue; consequently the voice of the COGOP is very weak when it comes to ecumenical discourses.

It is this lackluster public and ecumenical involvement that is becoming more and more bothersome to members of the COGOP. This is as a result of the newer members' socio-economic upward mobility; these members are associating with members of other churches, some of whom are unaware of the COGOP. These newer COGOP members want to see their church leaders sharing the national stage with other Pentecostal leaders and taking the lead in areas of ecumenical activities. The question is whether or not the leaders within the COGOP are educationally and socially prepared to fulfill this expectation of their growing membership.

Admittedly, however, the church has demonstrated an effort to educate its leaders by its association with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, where its leaders now have the opportunity to earn up to a doctoral degree in a Christian discipline. This new

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<sup>20</sup> "Population and Housing Census 2011," *Jamaica General Report*, 80.

thrust of the church can only do good for the leaders who are struggling to find their place in the sea of church leaders jostling for space on a small island of just under three million inhabitants. Within nine years, the church in Jamaica has had more than twenty graduates of GCTS, which is a significant accomplishment for the COGOP.

This paradigm shift, relating to the emphasis of the church on education for its clergy, should make its leaders more respected in ecumenical circles. It is also expected that the leaders will sense that they have a greater capacity to participate in ecumenical activities. In addition to the educational development of the leaders of the COGOP is the number of pastors who have become justices of the peace and marriage officers. These positions were at one time few and appeared to be only for the privileged, thus leaving others pastors to seek the assistance of the more accomplished pastors. However, this practice is changing to the benefit of the COGOP.

### **Jamaica's Complex Religious Landscape**

The Jamaican Constitution provides for freedom of creed and conscience for all citizens, according to chapter 3, section 21, sub-sections (1):

Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of, and for the purposes of this section the said freedom includes freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

This constitutional guarantee consequently means that “nearly every Christian denomination is represented on this beautiful tropical island.”<sup>21</sup> There is also a significant

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<sup>21</sup> Larry A. Nichols, George A. Mather, and Alvin J. Schmidt, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and World Religions*, rev. and updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 93.

presence of other religions on the island, and the proliferation of indigenous spiritual organizations such as Rastafarianism and Revivalism.

With this proliferation of churches and religious movements in Jamaica, other kinds of issues arise, such as syncretism, church rivalries, competitions for religious turf, and doctrinal indifferences, all working together for a greater challenge to ecumenical relationships. Naturally Jamaicans are very strong in their belief and are very committed to their theology/ideology. This is transferred to their faith, which could lead to both clergy and members causing offense against members from churches unlike their own. This church infighting, however, hurts only the church and its mission to the community and provides its critics with ammunition against it. Amid this, however, the church is still a formidable entity in Jamaica and continues to make significant contributions to the social and moral life of the society. The question that is still unanswered is, what more could the churches accomplish if they could work together in a more sustained way?

Jamaica is a society where the church is intricately interwoven in its daily life. Many national activities still have Christian prayers at their commencement; indeed, the national anthem is in the form of a prayer. Successive administrations have recognized the church as a significant partner in nation building and continually appeal to it for support. In a report of April 25, 2016, Jamaica's Prime Minister Andrew Holness urged "members of the church community to play a positive role in making a difference in Jamaica." Holness stated that his "government would continue to work hard in bringing

prosperity to Jamaica, which he said can be achieved through partnerships with the church, private sector and all civic and social groups.”<sup>22</sup>

This is an important declaration by Holness, especially when placed in a historical setting, Anna Kasafi Perkins reports Michael Manley, one of Holness’s predecessors, as an avid proponent for the church’s involvement in national life. According to Perkins, Manley “argued against those whom he said were a small minority among the men of God who repudiate absolutely the notion of temporal concern or involvement, He dismissed this minority as merely to be left to their own devices, silence and idiosyncratic mysteries.”<sup>23</sup> Manley’s assertions concerning the small minority could very well be referring to Pentecostals, who have been accused as historically being absent from ecumenical engagements in Jamaica, and by extension have little socioreligious effect on the political life of the country.

Manley’s observations could also be credited to the belief of some Christians who demonstrated unwillingness to associate with other Christians who were engaged in liberation activities. For Manley, liberation was a critical need for the church in a nation struggling to overcome its enslavement and colonial past which left its people oppressed, uneducated, and impoverished. Dale Bisnauth has carefully documented the historical problems of racism and classism from which the Jamaican church has been emerging after emancipation. Although slavery was abolished from 1838, the fact that the country remained a British colony for more than a century before it gained political independence meant that much of the colonial relic remained engrained in the society. These remaining

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<sup>22</sup> “PM Calls on Church to Play Positive Role in Jamaica,” *Jamaica Observer*, April 25, 2016, accessed May 29, 2017, <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/PM-calls-on-church-to-play-positive-role-in-Jamaica>.

<sup>23</sup> Anna Kasafi Perkins, *Justice as Equality: Michael Manley’s Caribbean Vision of Justice*, American University Studies, series VII, Theology and Religion, vol. 309 (New York: P. Lang, 2010), 49; accessed March 1, 2017, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10517055>.

colonial ideals essentially benefitted the privileged few and disadvantaged the majority of the inhabitants of the land, who were poor black manumitted slaves.

At the time of Jamaica's emancipation, Pentecostalism was not yet introduced to the country; therefore, the churches which were responsible for the spirituality of the manumitted slaves included the Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists and Anglicans. Understandably, with Jamaica remaining a member of the British Empire, the Anglican Church was very prominent in the country. According to Bisnauth, during the nineteenth century, leadership from these denominations was concentrated in the hands of white expatriates.<sup>24</sup> This lasted within the Anglican Church until the 1970s. In fact, when I attended the Anglican Church in the 1970s, the Rector, who came only once monthly to serve the rural congregation was a white Englishman. When he came, he would perform christenings and marriages and serve communion. Although there was a black lay reader, he was not authorized to perform those privileged religious duties.

Association with the white leader was obviously preferred by the black members of the church, as they would treat the lay reader with scant regard. As far as they were concerned, to have one of their own in such a leadership position did not provide them with the self-importance they desired. Therefore, the classism which has affected Pentecostalism and its leaders cannot be ignored within this argument of ecumenical relationships. For the affluent in the society, the worship style of Pentecostals, who were mainly from the poor and uneducated, was generally frowned upon for its loud and exuberant, un-European liturgy. It is out of this environment of classism that the Pentecostal leaders evolved and are now expected to take their place in ecumenical

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<sup>24</sup> D. A. Bisnauth, *A History of Religions in the Caribbean*, 2nd ed. (Kingston, Jamaica: LMH Publishing Limited, 2006), 196.

circles. The tension therefore is how Pentecostals reconcile this indifference between themselves and their non-Pentecostal counterparts who may have a different view of their ministry.

The fact that the early Pentecostal leaders did not benefit from good quality training and were mainly from the uneducated members of the society naturally placed them in a disadvantaged position. Within the COGOP the expansion was so rapid that leaders had to be provided by the most available individuals. Often times these are men and women who possessed limited leadership abilities and little or no formal education. Although reasonable efforts were made by the COGOP to address this problem, it still proved inadequate to empower many of these individuals to face the realities of church leadership outside their denominational confines. Therefore, this type of leadership inadequacy, coupled with a theology of exclusivism, made leaders think of themselves as possessing a superior spirituality. This uneducated and exclusivist mentality cannot be ignored in the argument for ecumenical engagement as the church remains barely involved in ecumenical organizations.

### **The Church of God of Prophecy and Affiliated Groups in Jamaica**

Within Jamaica there are various groups representing the churches, but they come under one larger group known as the Jamaica Umbrella Group of Churches. The COGOP is currently a member of “*The Jamaica Association of Full Gospel Churches*.” In the mid-1970s, Lesmon Graham, then pastor of the Maxfield Avenue COGOP, began an affiliation with the JAFGC. The Maxfield Avenue Church was the leading congregation in the denomination and situated in the urban St. Andrew area. After becoming national



overseer, Graham encouraged other bishops and pastors of the church to join the Association but was unsuccessful in convincing many. Therefore Graham did not commit the denomination to the Association but continued in his personal role as a member. The church eventually became a member in 1992; however, it has been poorly represented and plays very little role in the organization. Many of the ecumenical activities do not include the church.

The church also excluded itself from ecumenical relationships by its approach toward the establishing of the National Religious Media Company in 1987. Like other organizations, the church was invited to purchase shares in the entity; however, this was found unacceptable to the church since they wanted to maintain their unique ecclesial identity. This has now placed the church in a disadvantageous position regarding the benefits that could be derived from being involved in the leadership of the entity.

Although segments of the church blamed the JAFGC for not involving them in national activities or consulting with them on matters of national importance, they must take some responsibility for this. The lack of interest shown toward ecumenical activities by the leaders must also be blamed. As chairman of the Spanish Town Ministers' Fraternal, I had reasons to address some national issues in the media; of course many members of the church expressed their satisfaction and relief that at last there is a leader from the COGOP involved in the national dialogue. This demonstrates the need of the members of the church to see their leaders not only in their denominational settings but also engaged in ecumenical activities. This will cause the members to feel a sense of belonging among the Christian community.

My experience has proven that COGOP members wish to be identified with other Christians through their leaders. Since the GOGOP is not a well-known institution in Jamaica, notwithstanding its size and age, whenever its leaders are seen among others emboldens its members and gives them a sense of worth. The feedback from my involvement in these activities is always positive with members expressing the joy and excitement of seeing one of their own, not only in the background but playing a leading role.

After a recent media interview at an ecumenical activity, one member remarked, “When I saw my church on television I felt so proud.” Others have said that they wish to see more of their leaders in ecumenical settings and taking leading roles. Members will generally remark that they see other pastors from smaller churches and question why there is a continuous absence of their church from these activities. What is also known is that their members are not taking the same absentee approach as their pastors.

The reality is also that some other church leaders appear surprised whenever they recognize my church affiliation and will even express that surprise openly. Recently I attended the quarterly meeting of the JAFGC, and while I was greeted warmly and treated with respect, one could sense the other members were unaccustomed to seeing an official of the COGOP in these meetings. It could be argued that my Anglican formation may have better prepared me for ecumenical relationship since much of the ecclesial dogma which formed original members of the COGOP did not affect me in the same manner. From early on, I saw Christians as being equal members of the body of Christ, and as such did not embrace the COGOP as being more entitled for divine ownership above other churches.

Being an Anglican did not mean that there were no biases. What it meant was that I was able to accept other Christians since I also experienced being viewed as being a member of a cold, dead church. This was how as Anglican we were described by the COGOP members, who spared no opportunity to berate our Anglican faith. Interestingly, Father Sean Major Campbell, rector at the Vineyard Town Anglican Church, responding to my question concerning the acceptance of the Anglican Church toward Pentecostals, cautioned me that it is not the Anglicans who do not accept the Pentecostals but the other way around. He pointed out that for an Anglican to become a member of a Pentecostal church, that individual would need to be baptized by the Pentecostals.

Campbell makes a significant point with which I could readily identify as Anglican turned Pentecostal. During the process of conversion to Pentecostalism, I was constantly reminded by the members of the COGOP that I was not a Christian. I was made to believe that unless I became a member of the COGOP, then I could not be saved.

### **From Anglicanism to Pentecostalism**

Growing up within the Anglican Church gave me a sense of pride. Although there was a Seventh Day Adventist church, and later a COGOP, the Anglican Church was the community church. This may have been because its pastor was seen as qualified to perform certain duties, because he was white, or because Anglican was the “state” church. I attended that church along with my mother and siblings until I was about sixteen years old. My recollection of Anglicanism is one in which much symbolism and many creedal repetitions happened on Sundays, the only day we went to church. However, one thing that stood out was the pride which exuded from the members

because of their association with the Queen of England, who is still Queen of Jamaica. Therefore, we never integrated much with the other two churches because they seemed indifferent to us.

However, when the COGOP began establishing themselves with their flamboyancy, members of the Anglican Church began to flock to them. Some would go to the Anglican Church for the morning service and then to the COGOP for the evening service. The COGOP being more evangelistically inclined was scooping up not only regular churchgoers but also community members who were not regular church attendees. Therefore, one can imagine that it would not be long before tension between the two churches would increase. The COGOP would accuse the Anglicans of being a “graveyard” church, referring to it as being cold and dead, while the Anglicans would accuse the COGOP as being void of training, noisy, and without order. Notwithstanding the accusations against the COGOP, it remained the most vibrant of the three churches in the community, while the Anglican Church has been declining consistently with barely few people attending now.

As a convert from Anglicanism to Pentecostalism, I consider myself privileged to have the benefit of two types of spiritualities. Therefore, having assumed leadership in a Pentecostal organization, I began to see how some of the divisive factors may have been as a result of ignorance on both parts. For instance, one of the criticisms of the Anglicans by the Church of God of Prophecy was the way they preached. The fact that the Anglicans read their sermons from a prepared text was seen by the COGOP as inadequate and lacking inspiration. The Church of God of Prophecy believed that their preaching should be spontaneous; therefore, preachers were often selected only a few minutes

before the preaching time. The preaching was loud and punctuated with shouting and speaking in tongues and often went on for well over an hour.

The effects of Pentecostalism with its excitement on my rural Anglican church are not unique. Tracking the census from 1943 through to the 1970s, William Wedenoja highlighted that during this time, as Pentecostalism grew, “the denominations have steadily declined.” This he explains as representing “a striking pattern of decline in denominational Christianity and an accelerating rate of growth in Pentecostalism.”<sup>25</sup> Wedenoja identified the growth of Pentecostalism to be associated with a number of factors; these include Jamaica’s postwar modernization, the changes which influenced the society in postwar Jamaica, and the opening up of opportunities for Jamaicans who began to travel to the United States as well as Britain. Additionally, Jamaica’s political changes gave a new sense of self to ordinary Jamaicans, who saw the Pentecostal churches as a greater place of expression of their individuality.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Church of God of Prophecy, Jamaica, St. Catherine East Context**

As Pentecostalism continues its rapid expansion in the Jamaican society, one of the areas where this growth is greatest is in St. Catherine. This is the parish in Jamaica with the second largest number of residents, according to the 2011 population census. It has 516,281 inhabitants, just behind St. Andrew, which has a population of 573,369 persons.<sup>27</sup> The report states that “between 2001 and 2011 St. Catherine was the fastest growing parish,” growing by 7 percent. The parish is also the home of the largest

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<sup>25</sup> William Wedenoja, “Modernization and the Pentecostal Movement in Jamaica,” in *Perspectives on Pentecostalism: Case Studies from the Caribbean and Latin America*, ed. Stephen D. Glazier (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980), 30.

<sup>26</sup> Wedenoja, “Modernization and the Pentecostal Movement in Jamaica,” 34.

<sup>27</sup> Population and Housing Census 2011,” *Jamaica General Report 1*, iii.

dormitory community, where many of the nation's middle class are residing. It has also been attracting many housing developments as land availability in the neighboring Kingston and St. Andrew move from the reach of many working-class people as prices soar in the residential areas.

As St. Catherine grows, its capital, Spanish Town, accounts for many of the criminal activities on the island. The Town, which was the first capital of Jamaica before it lost its status to Kingston, also suffers from lack of socio-economic development with many of its citizens living in poor conditions. It is also afflicted by political polarization which manifests itself in the presence of two of the country's major gangs, which are aligned to the two major political parties. It is in this societal mêlée that the church is called upon to give leadership. This is evidenced in a headline which states "Bishop to Host Meeting with Spanish Town Rival Gangs."<sup>28</sup> This meeting was one in which pastors of the COGOP in the Spanish Town area were also invited to participate, as it was being channeled through the Spanish Town Ministers' Fraternal, but it received little response from them.

I have been a member of the Fraternal for more than fifteen years. I served as its secretary, treasurer, vice chairman, and chairman. I am also an overseer of the COGOP, supervising approximately forty-three pastors and thirty-nine local churches; however, many of these pastors continually show little interest in the Fraternal. I see this as an indication of their low interest in ecumenical relationships. Admittedly this is not a problem only in COGOP; however, with the church's thrust toward evangelism this has caused me concern. The COGOP does not have the resources for the impact that is

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<sup>28</sup> Jacqueline Harris, "Bishop to Host Meeting with Spanish Town Rival Gangs," *Riddim-Don*, October 15, 2016, accessed May 29, 2017, <http://riddim-donmagazine.com/bishop-to-host-meeting-with-spanish-town-rival-gangs/>.

needed in communities where they are located; consequently its leaders must find ways to develop ecumenical relationships that can assist the church to fulfill its Christian responsibilities to the communities it serves. Many of these communities have become havens for criminals who challenge law enforcement but at the same time will give respect to pastors they can trust and who are influencing change.

Ecumenical relationship is also important in a changing and challenging environment of scarcity of resources and abundance of needs. The reality is that many of the social interventions of the government involving churches go through associations instead of a single church body. Therefore, the COGOP will not benefit from these unless its leaders are around the discussion table. This will therefore disadvantage the church, for many of its congregations are located in depressed communities, and they too can greatly benefit from the involvement of church leaders. As a result of my personal ecumenical relationships, I have been able to forge associations with charitable organizations. An example is Food for the Poor, which has benefited other churches by the use of our church facility as a distribution center to other churches.

It is therefore important for leaders of the COGOP to grasp the revelation concerning the power of ecumenical relationships. It can make a significant difference which will lead to social justice and economic sustenance. This point has been made well by Robert C. Linthicum, who posits that the church needs to understand that

if it is called to make a difference. . . seeking to build a relational culture of justice, stewardship of the earth's resources, and equitable distribution of wealth, it will not accomplish this by pontificating on the same from lofty pulpit or by passing resolutions in denominational gatherings. It will make a difference and be respected by the political, economic and value creating systems and leaders of a city only as the church uses power intelligently.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Robert C. Linthicum, *Building a People of Power: Equipping Churches to Transform Their Communities* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2006), 107.

For Linthicum, to use power intelligently is “a willingness to work together in a city as one single body rather than one church doing its own thing.”<sup>30</sup> This is a principle well understood by many other entities outside of the church.

If the pastors of the COGOP St. Catherine East heed Linthicum’s admonition, they can benefit as they seek to take their place within the society. The gospel which the church is seeking to preach to a broken society should not be viewed as one void of concern for the poor but rather one holistic in nature. Surely, a united church working together to advance the kingdom of God is the clearest way to bear the witness of Jesus to a world which is searching for leadership unlike that which is seen in the world of politics and business. Jamaica’s divisive partisan politics, culture of stratification, and dependency have been entrenched within the society. Therefore the church, if it is not careful of its unifying role could find itself being viewed with the distrust given to political leaders.

Ecumenical relationships are also important to combat the historical problems of injustice which have bedeviled the Jamaican society for centuries. The church cannot continue to pretend that these realities are nonexistent or that the only way out is the impending rapture of the church. This is not to say that faith is not an important aspect of the church’s message and practice; however, as James proclaims, “faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:20). The church not only must proclaim faith but also put it into action. This is understood in a political sense in what Manley described as “Socialism of Love.”<sup>31</sup> By this term, Manley was wishing to make a connection between the “secular philosophy . . .

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<sup>30</sup> Linthicum, *Building a People of Power*, 107.

<sup>31</sup> Perkins, *Justice as Equality*, 25.



and the good deeds which the people derive from their Christian faith and Church experience.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, for Manley Christianity was “Socialism in Action.”<sup>33</sup>

Historically, the Pentecostal movement has been severely criticized for ignoring the plight of its members by preaching to them a gospel of insulation from their socio-economic realities to which Manley alludes. Notwithstanding such gospel, however, their members were not absolved from the conditions of injustice, poverty, inequality and crime which are generally viewed by church leaders as the works of Satan made possible through the political establishment. Therefore, to many Pentecostals, the darkness of political involvement was something to be shunned, as light and darkness could not exist together. Pentecostals took seriously the concept of separation of church and state.

The COGOP, with its reported membership of more than forty thousand people, including a national pastoral leadership of just above three hundred persons, should embrace the concept of ecumenical relationships in order to take advantage of its far reach. Within St. Catherine East there are just over five thousand members with a pastoral leadership of forty-three persons. This group of forty-three men and women consists of varying educational levels from primary to tertiary. However, the number of pastors with tertiary education is in the minority, and in relations to seminary-level education that number is even smaller. Many of the pastors are also serving on a part-time basis as they have to work outside of the church because the churches are generally unable to sustain them economically. Some also have to take a long and difficult journey to and from church, which oftentimes leaves them tired and with little time for ecumenical activities.

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<sup>32</sup> Perkins, *Justice as Equality*, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Perkins, *Justice as Equality*, 25.

Although there can be little doubt concerning the impact of the exclusivist doctrine on the present practices of these pastors, one cannot take for granted that this is the underlying cause for ecumenical ineptness. Therefore, in order to ascertain the facts and craft a solution to the problem, the church must discover the reasons for the low engagement of its leaders in ecumenical relationships. This is why this thesis-project will canvass the views of the pastors of the COGOP in St. Catherine East to know their position on ecumenical relationships. Let me hasten to reiterate that the church is no longer practicing its exclusivist doctrine and has taken significant steps toward reversing this view. However, what is seemingly missing are corrective measures that will empower its leaders to be better able to benefit from the changes. COGOP leaders need to be empowered to develop ecumenical relationships.

### **Why the Question of Ecumenical Relationships?**

If Weber's assertion concerning ecumenism ("the organized attempt to bring about the cooperation and unity of all believers in Christ"<sup>34</sup>) is acceptable, the church must be deliberate in its actions that will lead to this goal. Admittedly there are many dividing walls among the churches and a fair share of hostility that it must overcome to reach the ever-expanding and at the same time contracting secular world. I pointed out earlier that many countries and organizations have been consolidating their resources to tackle geopolitical issues. It is little wonder therefore that Brexit shocked the world since the nationalist action of the British voters for separation from the European Union ran contrary to the general direction where many globalists see the world to be heading.

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<sup>34</sup> Weber, "Evangelicals and Ecumenism," 363.

For decades the Caribbean has been on a quest toward some aspects of unity through various models such as the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), Caribbean Community & Common Market (CARICOM),<sup>35</sup> and the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), to name a few. These entities are designed to leverage the strengths of the Caribbean people and systems to benefit the inhabitants of the region. Also worthy of mention in this menu of Caribbean entities is the Caribbean Council of Churches (CCC). These various organizations provide a lesson to the wider Christian community, which is still struggling to come together amid their various beliefs for the good of their members as well as the wider societies which they have committed to serve. The church, like these entities, has a duty of care for all the people within their jurisdictions.

### **Conclusion**

Amid the myriad of socioreligious issues affecting Jamaica, there is an urgent need for the Pentecostal movement to assert itself within the wider church circle to give hope to the communities where they serve Christ. Historically the movement has been accused by those on the outside of not paying attention to the social ills affecting their community and pretending not to live in a geopolitical world. The COGOP, which has existed on Jamaica for more than nine decades as a vibrant Pentecostal church, is not exempted from this call and is particularly targeted as an entity which can greatly affect the society should its leaders grasp the benefit of ecumenical relationships.

However, while there are pockets of engagement by some leaders within the COGOP, the church as an organization remains relatively low-key and is not well known

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<sup>35</sup> CARICOM stands for Caribbean Community and Common Market and is defined as an organization made up of fifteen Caribbean nations to promote economic integration among members.

in national life. This is becoming increasingly discomfoting to members of the church who see leaders from other churches on the national stage. Therefore the challenge facing the COGOP is not a small one, as it must devise a strategy to get its leaders to be on par with their other Pentecostal counterparts. This means that the church must overcome a culture of self-centeredness and open itself to the idea of ecumenical engagement, not only in word but in deeds also.

The church must be commended for taking steps toward this by its association with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, where its leaders are benefitting from theological education from a non-COGOP institution. This partnership is groundbreaking for the church that has usually sought to train its leaders by itself. However the verdict as to whether or not this is gaining support from the pastors in the COGOP St. Catherine East, Jamaica, is not yet delivered.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

In reviewing the history of the ecumenical movement, there are varying schools of thoughts concerning how it was started, where it was started, and by whom. Both Pentecostals and ecumenists hold different views on the subject. However, the substantive lesson learnt in understanding ecumenism, past and present, should place today's church leaders in an advantageous position, which is, do not make the mistakes of your forebears. Both ecumenists and Pentecostals have lessons to learn from the observation of ecumenical relationships, though it is likely to happen only by a direct and undeniable move of the Holy Spirit in the universal but divided church.

This literature review on the relationship between Pentecostalism and ecumenism is sure to unearth the various arguments for and against each other. It will review some of the compelling doctrinal issues which have engulfed the movements over the years and identify some of the key players. The observations and lessons learned from this review will serve to address some of the issues raised in chapter 1 of this thesis-project, especially relating to the Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP). This is more likely to be expanded later when I approach the fourth and final chapters.

There can be no doubt that ecumenical relationship is a crucial matter for today's church in a world that is drifting further and further away from God. Therefore, instead of any one church or denomination trying to work singularly, a better way to advance God's

kingdom in the lives of people is to value the gifts and talents in all of the body of Christ and to leverage them for the glory of God, which is the ultimate goal of this study.

### **The History of Pentecostalism and Ecumenism**

Pentecostals have laid claim to the birth of the ecumenical movement by their assertion that Pentecostalism was born as a result of ecumenical passion. Walter Hollenweger has made this point emphatically: “I want to establish this fact that Pentecostalism started in most places as an ecumenical renewal movement in the mainline churches”<sup>1</sup> he declares. Over the years the ecumenical movement progressed as it began to host conferences and other ecumenical events to advance its views.

C. M. Robeck Jr. noted that “a triennial, international, ecumenical gathering of Pentecostals was first convened in 1947.”<sup>2</sup> This conference was promoting “spiritual fellowship among Pentecostals regardless of denominational affiliation or lack of it.”<sup>3</sup> It was also to serve as a demonstration to the world of “essential unity” of “Spirit-baptized believers in fulfillment of John 17:2; promotion of courtesy; mutual understanding and scriptural purity among. . . Pentecostal groups, maintenance of those Pentecostal truths most surely believed among us and cooperation of mutual concern in fulfilling the Great Commission.”<sup>4</sup> However, this ambitious goal of the Pentecostal World Conference was short-lived when “frustration” and “division emerged over polity, doctrine, mores and

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<sup>1</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1977; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 334.

<sup>2</sup> C. M. Robeck Jr., “Pentecostal World Conference PWC,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Ed van der Maas, rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 971.

<sup>3</sup> Robeck, “Pentecostal World Conference PWC,” 971.

<sup>4</sup> Robeck, “Pentecostal World Conference PWC,” 971.

personalities.”<sup>5</sup> However, for the sake of common witness and worship,<sup>6</sup> the attendees agreed to overlook some differences.

Judging from the objectives of this conference, it is clear that Pentecostals interpreted ecumenism as a movement that should bring them together as likeminded Christians, notwithstanding the Bible perspective they espoused to fulfill Jesus’ prayer for unity of all believers. Therefore, from early in the Pentecostal movement there was a need to clarify its perspective on ecumenism. Take, for instance, the objective to maintain “those Pentecostal truths ‘most surely believed among us,’”<sup>7</sup> which to Pentecostals seem to be closing themselves into a theological bubble while at the same time purporting to want to be the vehicle of ecclesial unity.

It is no wonder Peter Staple is on record as calling for the involvement of Pentecostal charismatics in the global ecumenical landscape. This is happening as ecumenism and Pentecostalism are two formidable movements in Christianity in the twenty-first century. Pentecostals who lay such claim to ecumenism should therefore take seriously Staple’s warning and advice, for according to him,

if global ecumenical historiography is to become “catholic in space” and “catholic in time” it must include the Pentecostal and Charismatic too; and also the root of Pentecostal faith and practice which go back through the holiness movement of the 19th century, via Methodism to the Early Church . . .<sup>8</sup>

Global ecumenical historiography further requires methodology and conceptual reflection in light of . . . developments in the worldwide ecumene. Ecumenicals and Pentecostals should now join forces in order to insert the story of Charismatic renewal into a global-ecumenical “narrative.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Robeck, “Pentecostal World Conference PWC,” 971.

<sup>6</sup> Robeck, “Pentecostal World Conference PWC,” 971.

<sup>7</sup> Robeck, “Pentecostal World Conference PWC,” 971.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Staple, “Some Ecumenical Observations,” in *Experience of the Spirit: Conference on Pentecostal and Charismatic Research in Europe at Utrecht University, 1989*, ed. Jon A. B. Jongeneel, vol. 68 of *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991), 261.

<sup>9</sup> Staple, “Some Ecumenical Observations,” 260.

Staple is clearly calling on Pentecostals to be true to their claim to the ecumenical movements which they have seemingly abandoned for the safe place of their churches.

Staple's observation joins the debate concerning the ecumenical movement, Christians from different sides have varying views on what its intentions were; such views are used to inform their ecumenical involvement. Highlighting the position of Pentecostals, Jerry L. Sandidge explained that "for the most part Pentecostals have been skeptical of the World Council of Churches (WCC), fearing the loss of evangelistic zeal and a compromise of faith on basic doctrines."<sup>10</sup> Sandidge pointed out the severity of this skepticism which led the Assemblies of God to pass a resolution in 1965 opposing the ecumenical movement.<sup>11</sup>

However, the Assemblies of God was not alone in its anti-ecumenical stance. For example the COGOP had for decades given little regard to ecumenism. To this extent there have been accusations concerning Pentecostals who have not sought to satisfy their lethargic posture toward ecumenism. However, Sandidge further pointed out "that there are some Pentecostal Churches that are full members of the WCC; although not many comparing to the large number of Pentecostals worldwide. The WCC has to their credit continued to show interest in the 'Worldwide Charismatic Movement,'" and this seems to be bearing fruit as "there seems to be openness to Pentecostals and a renewed concern for world evangelization."<sup>12</sup> Pentecostals should therefore discern what lesson they can learn from its rapid expansion while leveraging its strength for the ecumenical movement's world impact, an idea strongly put forth by Staple's argument.

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<sup>10</sup> Jerry L. Sandidge, "An Update on the Ecumenical Activities of Pentecostals," in *Experience of the Spirit: Conference on Pentecostal and Charismatic Research in Europe at Utrecht University, 1989*, ed. Jon A. B. Jongeneel, vol. 68 of *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991), 240.

<sup>11</sup> Sandidge, "Update on the Ecumenical Activities of Pentecostals," 240.

<sup>12</sup> Sandidge, "Update on the Ecumenical Activities of Pentecostals," 240.



Wolfgang Vondey also credits modern-day Pentecostalism with the beginning of the ecumenical movement.<sup>13</sup> As he sees it, Pentecostalism is ecumenical in nature, a claim made by Hollenweger also. Hollenweger advances the point by identifying founding leaders of Pentecostalism, describing them as possessing a spirituality of ecumenism; he cited men such as William H. Durham and Frank Bartleman. He further argued that “what occurred at Azusa Street was the beginning of a final outpouring . . . a heterogeneous body was thrown together, baptized in one Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> This interestingly coincides with Charles Parham’s claim of being an apostle of unity.<sup>15</sup>

However, while early Pentecostal leaders were trumpeting ecclesial unity, some historians saw it differently. According to Harold D. Hunter, who seems to have little tolerance for this argument, “many of the North American Pentecostal platitudes about unity by its leaders [were] not born in a vision of unity in diversity, but in belief systems that stipulated that all needed to come around to the Pentecostal way.”<sup>16</sup> Citing divisions within a year of the Azusa Street revival, Hunter decried Pentecostal unity and stated that “any defense of the ecumenical side of Pentecostalism has to cope with Roger Robin’s quip that early Pentecostals ecumenism was nothing but a commitment to proselytize all denominations without discrimination.”<sup>17</sup> Shirley C. Gordon picks up this issue of

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<sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, ed., *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Ecumenical Documents and Critical Assessments* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 24.

<sup>14</sup> Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 348.

<sup>15</sup> Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 348.

<sup>16</sup> Harold D. Hunter, “Global Pentecostalism and Ecumenism: Two Movements of the Holy Spirit?” in *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Ecumenical Documents and Critical Assessments*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 24.

<sup>17</sup> Hunter, “Global Pentecostalism and Ecumenism,” 24.

proselytism; according to him, in Jamaica, Christian proselytism since the nineteenth century has emerged from the United States and benefited Pentecostal churches.<sup>18</sup>

Peter Wagner, like Hunter, appears intolerant of Pentecostal ecumenical relationship, albeit for different reasons. Wagner sees an impending danger in modern Pentecostal ecumenical relationships and cautioned Pentecostals by stating,

Memories of one half century of scorn, ridicule and persecution at the hands of brothers and sisters in Christ are not easily erased from the Pentecostal consciousness. This has caused some second and third generation Pentecostal leaders to develop a deep desire to gain the love and respect of other Christians. They find themselves taking special pains to distance themselves from the “hillbilly religion” or the “holy rollers” of bygone days. They are increasingly uncomfortable with some of the theology and practices of their parents and grandparents . . . They want others to see that they are really more like Baptists and Nazarenes and Congregationalists than many people think.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, while Hunter accused Pentecostals of parasite-like behavior, Wagner holds the view that “interdenominational cooperation and ecumenism is watering down denominational distinctives, a known deterrent to church growth.”<sup>20</sup>

While Wagner makes a good point by saying—that Pentecostals must remember their heritage and not be ashamed of who they are, as I understand him to be saying—there are many things within Pentecostalism, including its approach to social engagement that need attention. Consequently, to suggest that Pentecostals continue without transformation would be detrimental. Therefore, with Pentecostals multiplying as they are abstaining from ecumenism is not an option; neither is it acceptable for them to overpower others in their doctrinal beliefs in order to advance their cause.

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<sup>18</sup> Shirley C. Gordon, *Our Cause for His Glory: Christianisation and Emancipation in Jamaica* (Barbados: The Press, University of the West Indies, 1998), 123.

<sup>19</sup> C. Peter Wagner, “A Church Growth Perspective on Pentecostal Missions,” in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 281.

<sup>20</sup> Wagner, “Church Growth Perspective,” 281.

Contrary to Wagner's view, Sandidge suggests at least one significant area where Pentecostals can benefit from and contribute to ecumenism. For Sandidge, "the rise of the Pentecostal Movement, the birth of the Ecumenical and Charismatic Movements and the second Vatican Council convened by the Roman Catholic Church" facilitated a greater awareness among churches of each other.<sup>21</sup> This, Sandidge posits, gave rise to what he describes as an "ecumenical approach to theology."<sup>22</sup> He continues by pointing out that this "approach does not undermine one's loyalty to his own church, nor does it exclude the development to particular schools and tradition of Christian thoughts."<sup>23</sup> This view gives a more tolerable position than that which Wagner posits and seems more beneficial for Pentecostals.

Within the history of Pentecostal's ecumenical relationships there are varying views summarized in the following positions. Hunter's proclamation of Pentecostalism anti-ecumenism has seemingly positioned him as a major critic of the movement; for him Pentecostalism claim of ecumenism is disingenuous. Wagner appears to be warning Pentecostals concerning their ecumenical relationships for fear of contamination, while Sandidge sees a role for Pentecostals in ecumenical relationships. These three different positions indicate the challenge that Pentecostals must grapple with in the twenty-first century church. Divergent views have for decades bothered inter-Pentecostalism relationships, making some of the criticism from non-Pentecostals fade in light of these indifferences; some of these differences will be highlighted later.

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<sup>21</sup> Sandidge, "Update on the Ecumenical Activities of Pentecostals," 239.

<sup>22</sup> Sandidge, "Update on the Ecumenical Activities of Pentecostals," 239.

<sup>23</sup> Sandidge, "Update on the Ecumenical Activities of Pentecostals," 239.

### Further Criticisms of Pentecostals

According to Steven J. Land, accusations of “elitism and divisiveness have been lodged against Pentecostals from the beginning.” He further posits that Pentecostals have been criticized for denigrating “the union of Christian initiation, especial their lack of understanding of baptism, the right of initiation in mainline churches.”<sup>24</sup> Land cites the claims against Pentecostals such as “subsequent elitism, and divisiveness” as mild charges from non-Pentecostals.<sup>25</sup> These are issues he claims which divide “Christians into . . . haves and have nots of redemptive experience.”<sup>26</sup> Land reports that according to critics of Pentecostals, “this kind of practice” leads naturally, if ungracefully, to division by encouraging people to leave dead formal churches for the free and lively worship of Pentecostal’s community of faith.”<sup>27</sup>

Pentecostals were also criticized for reasons other than their doctrine, and for reasons beyond their control. Hollenweger points out that criticism was leveled at Pentecostals in the events which ensued during the 1906 United States revival not only by secular sources but also from mainline churches. He reported that “mainline churches . . . criticized the emerging Pentecostal Movement; they despised the Pentecostals because of their lowly black origins.”<sup>28</sup> This ridicule however, did not prevent Pentecostals from expanding and developing on a worldwide scale.

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<sup>24</sup> Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), 214.

<sup>25</sup> Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 214

<sup>26</sup> Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 214.

<sup>27</sup> Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 214.

<sup>28</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, “Priorities in Pentecostal Research: Historiography, Missiology, Hermeneutics, and Pneumatology,” in *Experience of the Spirit: Conference on Pentecostal and Charismatic Research in Europe at Utrecht University, 1989*, ed. Jon A. B. Jongeneel, vol. 68 of *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991), 9.

## Issues Affecting Pentecostal Ecumenism

Pentecostals' ecumenical relationships have been fraught by different theological and social issues. In fact, denominationalism is largely the result of disagreements and the inability of church leaders to resolve issues. This has resulted in many times disagreements being placed in a spiritual context and made to appear as though it is a divine act at work. I am not saying that God cannot call someone to launch out into a new mission; however, this is not always the reason for bitter separations which leads to the establishing of new churches. Cecil M. Robeck Jr. sums up this issue well as he puts it "unsettled issues between the East and West-Orthodox and Catholic-as well as unresolved issues left over from reformation-Catholic and Protestants" have separated ecclesial traditions, families and even nations.<sup>29</sup>

Donald Roberts, in his summarization of this problem of denominationalism, writes:

a Phenomenon which took place in the second half of the twentieth century and onwards is the proliferation of churches, which are not necessarily denominations, but are very large groups. Some of these have tens of thousands of members. They have close collaboration with other bodies or denominations. They have come about by dint of the hard work of dynamic and charismatic individuals. They present a variegated and multicolored amalgam of doctrinal and practical commitments that make the average unchurched person scratch his head in frustration and confusion. Today the ecclesiastical landscape across the world is one of the most confusing in Christian history.<sup>30</sup>

Roberts further amplifies Hollenweger's view point with respect to Pentecostal doctrinal issues, but also highlights the implications of denominationalism for evangelicalism and

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<sup>29</sup> Cecil M. Robeck Jr., "Ecumenism," in *The Anthropology of Christianity*, vol. 10, *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 286, accessed August 3, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/columbia/detail.action?docid=570667>.

<sup>30</sup> Donald Roberts, *The Certainty of Your Salvation: A Biblical Response to Sabbath – Sunday Controversy* (Kingston, Jamaica: DATEM [The Development Agency of the Teaching Ministry], 2014), 226.

missions. If the churches appear to be in competition rather collaboration, naturally the attractiveness of their gospel they proclaims will be lost in the religious confusion.

Hollenweger, while acknowledging the growth of Pentecostalism, points to its varying doctrinal issues. He cautions that “doctrinally Pentecostals [are] not a consistent whole. There are Trinitarians and anti-Trinitarians, infant and adult baptism, Sunday and Sabbath keeping Pentecostals and many other versions.”<sup>31</sup> He asserts that with all these issues, even though “there is no worldwide Pentecostal organization,” the movement has been expanding.<sup>32</sup> Keeping true to his belief that the movement has been ecumenical in nature, he claims that the “ecumenical [wholistic] holistic understanding of Pentecost which is building up the body across racial and other barriers lies at the heart of Pentecostalism.”<sup>33</sup> A vision he adds has “been badly distorted by later Pentecostal mission-praxis and theory.”<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, as Pentecostalism continues its proliferation across the globe, with more and more independent charismatic churches springing up all over, doctrinal differences will continue to be at the forefront of the plethora of contentious issues that it will have to grapple with. Interestingly, many of these new groups are establishing their own Bible schools; therefore, it will be difficult to find common doctrinal ground on which even Pentecostalism can stand.

In Jamaica, independent churches are rising up at a rapid rate, and many are being established solely on the leader’s spirituality and vision. This will continue to make the ecumenical landscape more contentious and in greater need of ecumenism. Therefore,

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<sup>31</sup> Hollenweger, “Priorities in Pentecostal Research,” 9.

<sup>32</sup> Hollenweger, “Priorities in Pentecostal Research,” 9.

<sup>33</sup> Hollenweger, “Priorities in Pentecostal Research,” 9.

<sup>34</sup> Hollenweger, “Priorities in Pentecostal Research,” 10.

Pentecostals' historical anti-ecumenism, resulting from suspicions of other Christians and fear of contamination, will need to be discouraged.

Pentecostals' fear of association makes them susceptible to false teachings through poor hermeneutics. For years the COGOP prided itself in an ecclesiology which made it felt distinct and detached from others churches; this was evidently the result of faulty theology. However, Pentecostals such as COGOP need not fear ecumenism any longer since they too are becoming a part of the conversation. Thanks to Pentecostal scholars such as Frank D. Macchia, "one of the first Pentecostal systematic theologians to incorporate the gains of ecumenism into his theology."<sup>35</sup> This observation of Macchia is noteworthy given the assertion of Robeck that "early Pentecostal leaders, pastors and 'theologians' typically had little if any firsthand ecumenical experience with those from tradition unlike their own."<sup>36</sup>

Sandidge advances the skepticism of Pentecostal further by adding that they also "have been skeptical of the World Council of Churches (WCC), fearing the loss of evangelistic zeal and a compromise of faith on basic doctrine," and therefore declining to join the WCC.<sup>37</sup> Sandidge did not indicate which doctrine Pentecostals were concerned about, but one does not need to think too hard to assume that aspects of Pentecostal spirituality could come in at the top. Naturally there are other issues that will be unearthed from these reviews which will have to form a part of the consideration in this melee of positions and counterpositions.

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<sup>35</sup> Christopher A. Stephenson, *Types of Pentecostal Theology: Method, System, Spirit*, Academy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 59.

<sup>36</sup> Robeck, "Ecumenism," 286.

<sup>37</sup> Sandidge, "Update on the Ecumenical Activities of Pentecostals," 240.

In addition to the above-mentioned observations, Joe Aldridge, while highlighting challenges of black Pentecostal leaders in the United Kingdom, opined that “the ecumenical challenge is a major one.” According to Aldridge, the ecumenical challenge “includes for example, black-black ecumenism, black-white ecumenism, and multi-cultural ecumenism, internationalist ecumenism, and working with ecumenical agencies; some would even argue for consideration to be given to inter-faith relations between the three Abrahamic faiths.”<sup>38</sup> To this extent, Aldridge called for action from black Pentecostals toward unity, citing that “the unity prayed for by Jesus in John 17 embarrassed us profoundly.”<sup>39</sup> For him, this unity does not necessarily mean that all will be well, but rather that the church should seek to focus on the aspects of unity that exist among it and seek to capitalize on them.

### **Doctrinal Challenges to Pentecostal Ecumenical Relationship**

As Pentecostals emerge from their historical rejection, the sense among them is that they have been persecuted by non-Pentecostals. Pentecostals now seem to be repaying non-Pentecostals as Pentecostalism expands by leaps and bounds while at the same time the traditional non-Pentecostal churches are contracting in numbers. As we saw in chapter 1, in Jamaica the traditional churches have been declining. Therefore, Pentecostals demonstrate a behavior which suggests that God has vindicated them while punishing their oppressors and opponents, a position which does not accord with ecumenism.

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<sup>38</sup> Joe Aldridge, “Challenges of Black Pentecostal Leadership in the United Kingdom,” in *Challenges of Black Pentecostal Leadership in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Phyllis Thompson (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013), 22.

<sup>39</sup> Aldridge, “Challenges of Black Pentecostal Leadership in the United Kingdom,” 22.



David L. Cole, while arguing for Pentecostals to embrace ecumenism, acknowledged a trend in this direction. In doing so, he makes a point which seems to amplify the idea of a default acceptance of Pentecostals on the ecumenical stage. According to Cole, “by the end of the century Pentecostals showed signs of accepting responsibility for an ecumenical vision, while leaders from among the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the post Roman Vatican II Roman Church realized that the growing Pentecostal Movement was too significant to be ignored.”<sup>40</sup> This assertion further advances my point that Pentecostals may now feel that the balance of power is tipped in their favor and see ecumenism as a way to further advance this development. However, it is that same reason why Pentecostals need to demonstrate unity from a theological position and not a political one.

The following sections of this chapter will examine some of the major doctrinal differences affecting Pentecostal ecumenical relationships with their non-Pentecostal counterparts

### Tongues

As was alluded to earlier, Pentecostal spirituality starts out with a sense of disregard of the existence of some other beliefs. According to Land, Pentecostals mirror Azusa Street with Pentecost, describing it as “the latter rain restoration of apostolic faith and power for the last day’s evangelization of the world.”<sup>41</sup> In this furtherance of Pentecostals’ spirituality; there is a sense that they possess a superior spirituality to their

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<sup>40</sup> David L. Cole, “The Future Ecumenical Challenges—Holy Spirit Empowerment in the Twenty-First Century: Ecumenical Challenges,” in *Spirit-Empowered Christianity in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Vinson Synan (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2011), 238.

<sup>41</sup> Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 6.

non-Pentecostal counterparts. They lay claim to the “full gospel” comprised of the five “theological motifs: 1) justification by faith in Christ, 2) sanctification by faith as a second definite work of grace, 3) healing for the body as Christ has promised in the atonement, 4) the pre-millennial return of Christ and 5) the baptism of the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues.”<sup>42</sup> The fifth motif is their most distinguishing mark, according to Land.

J. H. King, however, called attention to the celebrated Pentecostal heritage which according to him was “first and foremost a product of spiritual milieu of America’s Holiness Movement.” King opined that

it was inevitable that the introduction of religious views as radical and emotionally divisive as the Pentecostals’ would cause criticism and controversy both without and within the holiness movement. Coming as a grand division within the older holiness movement, it was not surprising that some of Pentecostalism’s earliest and bitterest critics were members of those holiness churches that rejected the tongues doctrine. One of the ironies of church history is that those responsible for new religious movement often become hostile to the result of their own work.<sup>43</sup>

This observation of King points to the potential problems that Pentecostal spirituality, in this case speaking in tongues, will pose in the ecumenical circle.

One can therefore see how contentious Pentecostals’ practice of speaking in tongues can easily be if they are determined to carry out this practice in ecumenical settings with others do not have such a belief system. It is arguable that Pentecostals ought to be free to speak in tongues as they like, just as Roman Catholics should be free to use their holy water or Anglicans their incense. However, I would argue that self-

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<sup>42</sup> Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> J. H. King (1917), “Criticism and Controversy 1906–20,” in *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, Vinson Synan, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), loc. 1515.

restraint is important when seeking to build a relationship. This is indeed true on both sides, since in ecumenism respect for others is a critical Christian virtue.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that John MacArthur would chose to insult the belief and practice of millions of people in the manner he did. According to MacArthur, “endorsing babble opens the door into broader Pentecostalism, since speaking in tongues is the hallmark of the Pentecostal Movement. From there is paved a pathway for ecumenism, since the phenomenon is experienced in many doctrinally diverse group (including Roman Catholic and even non-Christian religion).”<sup>44</sup> According to MacArthur, if speaking in tongues is a gift from the Holy Spirit, how do “Roman Catholic and non-Christians who are devoid of the Spirit do it?”<sup>45</sup>

### Restorationism

Another contentious matter in Pentecostal spirituality is their restorationist theory. Pentecostals believe in the restoration of “the apostolic faith and power for the end time through signs and wonders.”<sup>46</sup> This restorationism theory on its own poses little challenge in ecumenism; however, when juxtaposed with cessationism, conflict will be inevitable. It is not hard to see that an adherent of the Pentecostal movement may find it difficult to have communion with someone who treats their spirituality in the same manner as MacArthur. He actually berated Pentecostals when he stated that “it is deeply ironic that

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<sup>44</sup> John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 244.

<sup>45</sup> MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 244.

<sup>46</sup> Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 6.

the movement most concerned with emphasizing the Holy Spirit is, in fact, the one that treats Him with the greatest contempt and condescension.”<sup>47</sup>

To accuse Pentecostals of contempt and condescension toward the Holy Spirit is a statement which will no doubt cause them to avoid ecumenical activities involving someone who shows contempt of and disregard for their belief. Arguably, some Pentecostals have provoked criticism against themselves; however, most are genuine in their faith and love for Christ and respect for the Holy Spirit.

Cessationists’ approach to Pentecostals may be one of the reasons for their anti-ecumenism. If ecumenism meant only to have meetings together and engage in social justice activities, then it may be tolerable. However, when ecumenical relationships are developed and mature, it should create a sense of respect of one’s belief. Pentecostals’ belief in the power of the Holy Spirit to produce miracles in their churches and beyond is central to them and touches others outside the movement. In fact, while leaders of the churches who do not openly confess to possess the gifts of the Spirit are rejecting this doctrine, their members are busy attending Pentecostal churches in pursuit of greater spiritual experiences, including divine healing and Holy Spirit baptism.

### Creedal Rejection

Pentecostals were also opposed to a liturgy comprised of creeds. In the history of the COGOP they considered that when the church met in the Council of Nicea (325), accepting the creed and not opposing it led the church into apostasy. The church taught that “the Council of Nicea was a takeover by the Roman government without the

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<sup>47</sup> MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 18.

church's objection."<sup>48</sup> For the COGOP, therefore, this action plunged the church into apostasy or "the dark ages." This is so since the council was convened by the emperor, who was not a divinely ordained person such a bishop, the church contended. According to the COGOP, "technically the Church of God ceased to function the moment the creed was accepted and almost fifteen centur[ies] of Dark Ages under the 'state church' began."<sup>49</sup>

This position of the COGOP is not corroborated by G. W. Bromiley. Although Bromiley cautions against what for him "can become formal, complex, and abstract," he credits creeds as a way to affirm the fundamental doctrines of the Christian church against Gnosticism.<sup>50</sup> He adds that properly handled, "creeds facilitate public confession, serve a succinct basis of teaching, safeguard pure doctrine and constitute an appropriate focus on the church's fellowship in faith."<sup>51</sup> Noting the observation of Bromiley, it is important for Pentecostals to educate themselves on this subject which has the potential of affecting ecumenical relationships. The COGOP asserts that although "apostasy continues to work among the kingdom saints, Isaiah's prophecy indicates that it will never again overflow the church (Isaiah 54:9, 10). Saved individuals and faithful groups in the kingdom will hear and heeds the Great Shepherd's voice and will forsake the erroneous teaching and forms of godliness."<sup>52</sup>

However, in a dramatic turn of events, the COGOP in its 99th International Assembly in 2016 adapted what is described as a "statement of faith." One could argue,

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<sup>48</sup> Bible Training Institute Advanced Studies (1984), 28.

<sup>49</sup> Bible Training Institute Advanced Studies, 28.

<sup>50</sup> G. W. Bromiley, "Creed, Creeds," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 284.

<sup>51</sup> Bromiley, "Creed, Creeds," 284.

<sup>52</sup> Bible Training Institute Advanced Studies, 28.

however, that the church may not have been against creeds, but rather its position was in protest to the manner in which the creeds were developed. It is interesting to note that in its rationale for establishing the Statement of Faith, the church declares it is “convinced that our present exposure to and cooperation with other Christians, and our exposure to people of non-Christian religions make such a statement imperative.”<sup>53</sup> Acceptance of a Statement of Faith appears to be a shift in the way the church views creeds and appears to uphold the views of Bromiley.

### Social Stratification

In its incipient years, Pentecostals have been viewed by non-Pentecostals as being lesser than them academically and socially. Non-Pentecostals see Pentecostals as inadequate in their preparation to perform ministerial duties due to their lack of theological training. However, while it is true that Pentecostals historically lacked training, this problem should be placed in context. Many of the theological educational institutions were always aligned with non-Pentecostal churches, and given the Pentecostals’ suspicions regarding the WCC, one would be hard pressed to find them attending seminaries which were operated by WCC member churches. Additionally, many of the older Pentecostal leaders did not possess the onerous qualifications to enter seminary, which made the situation more complicated for them.

Diane J. Austin-Broos observes that in Jamaica, early “Pentecostals drew the lower classes,”<sup>54</sup> and among this lower class are “especially women engaged in modest

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<sup>53</sup> Statement of Faith, accessed July 31, 2017, <http://cogop.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/BDP-Final-Report-English.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Diane J. Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 81.

work.”<sup>55</sup> She concludes that Pentecostals were “qualified only by revelation.”<sup>56</sup> Austin-Broos echoes the sentiments of Donald McGavran, who states that “in Jamaica, the Churches of God, Adventists, Pentecostals and Churches of Christ are Churches of the Masses with leadership largely from the Masses.” McGavran distinguishes “the Presbyterians, Methodists and Anglicans as Churches of the Classes.” He further states that “the Baptists . . . who championed the abolition of slavery, the Moravians, the Brethren and the Disciples of Christ are the churches of the Masses, but their leadership and public worship is solidly upper class.”<sup>57</sup>

According to William Wedenoja, “there are many in Jamaica who oppose Pentecostalism, and they are largely people in positions of power; the traditional elite in government, politics, business and religion.” He reports that “Pentecostalism is seen as a threat to denominations, misguided beliefs by the better-off and nuisance to the government.”<sup>58</sup> This observation by Wedenoja shows the struggles that Pentecostal leaders endured in Jamaica, and their resilience, which is no doubt the result of their deep conviction and spirituality. This is important since during the 1970s, at the height of the political revolution in Jamaica, the Pentecostal movement was a vigorous and formidable one, as Wedenoja discovered.<sup>59</sup>

In further assessing the problems affecting Pentecostal ecumenical relationships in Jamaica it is necessary to examine how Pentecostal leaders are viewed by their non-Pentecostal counterparts. As was stated before, some practices of Pentecostal spirituality

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<sup>55</sup> Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis*, 97.

<sup>56</sup> Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis*, 81.

<sup>57</sup> Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis*, 93.

<sup>58</sup> William Wedenoja, “Modernization and the Pentecostal Movement in Jamaica,” in *Perspectives in Pentecostalism: Case Studies from the Caribbean and Latin America*, ed. Stephen D. Glazier (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980), 43.

<sup>59</sup> Wedenoja, “Modernization and the Pentecostal Movement in Jamaica,” 45.

tend to demonstrate contempt for others' beliefs, thus provoking denominational disunity. Kortright Davis alludes to this when he observes that "Pentecostals refused to take up membership in the Caribbean Council of Churches" for "fear that association with them" will cause them to lose their conversion experience, which took them away in the first place.<sup>60</sup> Roberts, however, is of the view that denominational isolation is a great problem with which the church must grapple.<sup>61</sup>

### Lack of Concern for Social Justice

Pentecostals have been accused of lacking care for the poor. I see this as a major ecumenical issue since the world at large, including Jamaica, continues to experience many sufferings. For Lewin L. Williams, Pentecostals' lack of interest in the psychosocial areas of human life is caused by their theology. Pointing to elements of rejection by Pentecostals to ecclesial customs and traditions, Williams sees this as a result of Pentecostals' understanding of "the body-soul dualism in the human person."<sup>62</sup> In this he argues that Pentecostalism "separate[s] the soul for emphasis and becomes concerned with only its salvation. As a result it postponed the rectification of the ills and injustices of the present world for some future redress in the next world."<sup>63</sup>

Delano Palmer picks upon Williams's criticism by stating that "the church can do more" and in this discourse singles out evangelicals as his main target audience who need

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<sup>60</sup> Kortright Davis, "Issues in Caribbean Theology—Neo-Pietism and Recolonization," in *Caribbean Theology*, ed. Lewin L. Williams, 2nd ed., Research in Religion and Family (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 137.

<sup>61</sup> Roberts, *Certainty of Your Salvation*, 239.

<sup>62</sup> Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, 138.

<sup>63</sup> Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, 137.



to do more.<sup>64</sup> Palmer opines that “while Evangelical” (and Pentecostal) “social engagement may be growing in the broad area of education, its concern for social justice and the poor has not kept pace. This tendency appears to be a blot against the movement in several parts of the globe.”<sup>65</sup>

Wedenoja, however, presents Pentecostals’ engagement in a different light. He makes the salient point that “Pentecostalism has also come to play important roles in the social system.”<sup>66</sup> He advances the claim that “in many Jamaican communities Pentecostal churches are the only group beyond the family, and they act as community centers in providing leadership, entertainment and forum for expression and formulation of public opinion sponsoring local events and serving as agencies for social control and social welfare.”<sup>67</sup> This observation of Wedenoja is a crucial nexus between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals concerning social engagement. Pentecostals do not possess the same resources as their non-Pentecostal counterparts in Jamaica.

Therefore, although the Pentecostal movement has historically been the object of stratification because their members are drawn from the lower class, they are being recognized for their positive contributions to nation building as well as ecumenical activities. Wedenoja further credits the movement as

an effective vehicle for the further integration of stratified and pluralistic society and culture. It has been successful in gathering converts from all sectors of the lower and middle class and from a number of racial groups, unlike previous religion in Jamaica. In order to remain competitive . . . Denominational churches are becoming increasingly Pentecostal in their ritual and ideology. Soon, regardless of church the dominant Jamaica religious ethos will be Pentecostal and

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<sup>64</sup> Delano Palmer, “Evangelicalism as a Social Phenomenon? A Movement in Search of a Caribbean Identity,” in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Garnett Roper and J. Richard Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 147.

<sup>65</sup> Palmer, “Evangelicalism as a Social Phenomenon? A Movement in Search of a Caribbean Identity,” 151.

<sup>66</sup> Wedenoja, “Modernization and the Pentecostal Movement in Jamaica,” 41.

<sup>67</sup> Wedenoja, “Modernization and the Pentecostal Movement in Jamaica,” 41.

this may be the beginning of a unified culture with a common rather than pluralistic value, structure and worldview.<sup>68</sup>

A careful analysis of this observation gives the impression that the point made, which places Pentecostalism as an ecumenical movement, might be fulfilled in Jamaica as Wedenoja presents it in this discourse.

### **The Future for Ecumenism**

Cole believes the issue facing Pentecostals in this century is “the question of appropriate relationships between the Pentecostal Charismatic Movement and ecumenism.”<sup>69</sup> This is presented in a framework where Cole believes that the “movement has a God-given mandate to be ecumenical.”<sup>70</sup> He adds that he is advocating for “the *ecumenical responsibility* of our movement, churches and ministries to be totally the body of Christ in the world.”<sup>71</sup> Cole goes on to list initiatives and individuals who are working toward Pentecostal ecumenism. Among the initiatives cited is the revelation that “Pentecostals have been involved in a number of bilateral dialogues at the international levels since the early 1970s.”<sup>72</sup>

According to Cole, the “longest running and most significant international bilateral dialogue to date involving Pentecostals has been the international Pentecostal Catholic dialogue.”<sup>73</sup> These dialogues “relate to conversion, faith, Christian experience, baptism in the Holy Spirit and Christian formation.”<sup>74</sup> These are not the only topics

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<sup>68</sup> Wedenoja, “Modernization and the Pentecostal Movement in Jamaica,” 42.

<sup>69</sup> David L. Cole, “Future Ecumenical Challenges,” in *Spirit-Empowered Christianity in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Vinson Synan (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2011), 237.

<sup>70</sup> Cole, “Future Ecumenical Challenges,” 237.

<sup>71</sup> Cole, “Future Ecumenical Challenges,” 237.

<sup>72</sup> Cole, “Future Ecumenical Challenges,” 251.

<sup>73</sup> Cole, “Future Ecumenical Challenges,” 251.

<sup>74</sup> Cole, “Future Ecumenical Challenges,” 251.

covered in the dialogues, and the topics are sensitive ones for Pentecostals. This is why Aldridge appeals to Pentecostals to pursue spiritual maturity. He states that “the place to pursue is a place of spiritual maturity and spiritual bondedness, of redeemed diversity that is devoid of the . . . traits of divisiveness.”<sup>75</sup>

Pentecostals and ecumenicals are both required to exhibit tolerance, because ecumenism is not accomplished by uniformity. The ability to accept and respect different views is a true sign of spiritual maturity. For example, Staple opines that “in such a global ecumenical perspective, both divine healing and especially glossolalia now seem to crucial to charismatic identity; though both are controversial in the Ecumenical Movement.” He adds that “progress could be made if the ecumenicals recognize the biblical legitimation of both these practices whilst the Charismatic recognize that the charismata are bestowed upon the body of Christ as a whole.”<sup>76</sup>

Although the local ecumenical movement is not as developed in Jamaica as it is in North America, a few local writers have identified some issues that fit into the ecumenical discourse. This is demonstrated in an observation by Newman, who acknowledges a “new sign of unity and working together . . . among the leadership of umbrella groups of churches”<sup>77</sup> in Jamaica. Newman’s observation echoes sentiments of the “international dialogue between some Classical Pentecostal church leaders and the Catholic church.”<sup>78</sup> The umbrella group of churches provides an opportunity for continued ecumenism in the church in Jamaica and could also serve as a model for

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<sup>75</sup> Aldridge, “Challenges of Black Pentecostal Leadership in the United Kingdom,” 22.

<sup>76</sup> Staple, “Some Ecumenical Observations,” 261.

<sup>77</sup> Las G. Newman, “Can Jamaica Be Restored?” in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Garnett Roper and J. Richard Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 134.

<sup>78</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity*, 95.

churches in other parts of the Caribbean where such a deliberate approach toward ecumenical relationships may be missing from the religious discourse.

Interestingly, this concept of an umbrella group of churches is not an entirely new one, although not specifically the same format. Arthur Charles Dayfoot documents cooperation among the churches in the West Indies in the late nineteenth century. He explains that “in the West Indies there were early expressions of interdenominational concerns and some steps towards co-operation. Informal association among missionary and some Church clergy and lay Christians in the interest of bringing the gospel to the slaves, is frequently recorded.” He further points out that “the local auxiliaries of the bible society have probably been active longer than any other form of organized interdenominational activity.”<sup>79</sup> From these historic associations have developed entities such as the Jamaica Christian Council.<sup>80</sup>

Jamaican society is bedeviled by a myriad of psychosocial conditions which affect a wide cross section of its inhabitants. Crime, poverty, child abuse, injustice, and lack of opportunities are just some of the broad headings. Successive administrations have implemented strategies, enacted laws, and launched special operations, yet the social ills continue. In 2017 the government of Jamaica enacted a new law called “The Law Reform (Zones of Special Operation) Special Security and Community Development Measures Act” with a view to advance its agenda to solve the mushrooming crime problems in Jamaica as gangs and gun violence continue to instill fear in citizens. In this endeavor the government actively seeks the assistance of the church in executing its plan for community restoration.

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<sup>79</sup> Arthur Charles Dayfoot, *The Shaping of the West Indian Church, 1492–1962* (Barbados: The Press, University of the West Indies, 1999), 233.

<sup>80</sup> Dayfoot, *Shaping of the West Indian Church*, 233.

Critics of the Jamaican church accuse it of spending more time in protecting the buggery law than being concerned with the social decay which is also breeding crime. This as they do not see the same fervor against crime from the church as is demonstrated against the impending repeal of the buggery law. This is demonstrated in a recent split in the ranks of the local evangelical group. In *The Gleaner* of July 30, 2017, it was reported that

the Reverend Garnett Roper, president of the Jamaica Theological Seminary, has found himself in trouble over his decision to declare his support for the decriminalization of buggery. Roper's position has not found favor with the Jamaica Evangelical Alliance (JEA), which has hinted that he could be asked to leave the group. "We reserve the right to ask somebody to remove themselves from the organization by virtue of the fact that what they have articulated publicly is not in the interest of advancing the cause of the association, so it will form part of the discussion that we will be having with the board," Bishop Alvin Bailey, president of the JEA, told the *Gleaner*.<sup>81</sup>

This revelation demonstrates the complex ideological and theological realities of the Jamaica ecclesial landscape and strengthens the reasons why Pentecostals must now position themselves to give spiritual leadership to the broken society.

### **Conclusion**

A main focus of ecumenism is the idea of working together on areas where Christians can be united in service to Christ. Surely theological unity can be accomplished only through the Holy Spirit, so let us allow him to work in this area until such time when we are allowed to participate. However, if the only areas of ecumenism

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<sup>81</sup> Ryon Jones, "Roper Under Fire—Buggery Stance Could Cost Prominent Churchman His Place in Evangelicals Group," *The Gleaner*, July 30, 2017, accessed August 1, 2017, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20170730/roper-under-fire-buggery-stance-could-cost-prominent-churchman-his>.

we can engage in are the support of conventions, conferences, and special worship services celebrating special events, we must take stock of ourselves as Christian leaders.

In this regard, both Pentecostals and ecumenicals in Jamaica can participate in social justice actions. In this way communities can benefit from the work of not just a single church or a denomination but the whole body of Christ. Ecumenism can also be reached on the subject of theological education. This can be accomplished through carefully developed curriculum as well as ensuring ecumenical composition of academic boards. There is also great opportunity in evangelism for the church through an ecumenical approach to win souls not only for one church but also for many churches.

The object of this study is the COGOP, St. Catherine East, Jamaica. Therefore it is also important to examine how the COGOP can benefit from the review. One of the unfortunate discoveries of this review is the absence of material on the local spectrum. The COGOP, being a leading denomination, can begin to document its work for future generations to benefit from. Additionally, the COGOP, St. Catherine East, is not absolved from the criticisms of Pentecostals and as such should pay attention to the views of others and take stock of itself against the broader criticism of Pentecostal ecumenism. Therefore as the leaders of the COGOP prepare themselves to serve the body of Christ, like Macchia they can intertwine their theology with their ecumenical activities.

## CHAPTER 3

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

The issues surrounding ecumenism must be placed not only in a historical but also and more importantly in a biblical and a theological context. The very concept of promoting ecumenism derives from a problem of disunity within the body of Christ. The church should be the greatest symbol of unity in the earth. However, as we have seen in previous chapters, the church is a divided entity that continues to suffer from divisions and factions and is viewed by the unbelieving community with confusion and disdain. Divisiveness within the church therefore emboldens its detractors who see a kind of dichotomy between the message of the church and how the church lives in the earth.

One can argue that many of the actions of the church fall short of the love which is the hallmark of the Christian faith. Church leaders have often publicly criticized other churches' leaders with whom they have doctrinal or administrative disagreements. Historically, this has been done by Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals, as we have seen before, and one would have hoped that in these days of greater knowledge it is not so; however, unfortunately this is still happening in the church.

It is therefore important to examine the biblical perspectives that could help us to understand the causes of divisiveness in the church, and what approach it needs to take to present a more united presence and witness to their societies. This is needed as the Western world is drifting further from Judeo-Christian principles to embrace more secular views, while at the same time the social ills are increasing. In Jamaica, although

the Christian tradition is still very strong, the impact of the church is wanting as crime and violence stalk the land. Therefore, it is my hope that this chapter will also offer some healthy reflections for everyone, particularly Pentecostal church leaders.

### **Ecumenism: Old Testament Perspectives**

The main source of doctrine for the Christian church is the Scriptures, although admittedly there is not a universal version or translation of the Bible which is read in all the churches. The question, therefore is, why then are churches so bitterly divided in regards to the same Bible they all hold as sacred. The response to this question will more likely be answered subjectively, which will not solve the problem; however, on the face of it, hermeneutical discords are at the center of ecclesial divisions. How the church reconciles its divisiveness with the unity within the Divine Community is a question to which it must seek to respond.

Within the Creation narrative, Moses, author of the book of Genesis gives us the first representation of a unified Divine Community. In Gen 1:26a, “then God said, let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” The language contained in the passage; Us and Our, sets the tone for unity in divine work. Man is created in the image of God, thus man has innate attributes of His Creator such as love, justice, mercy, patience and so on. Therefore, un-ecumenical conducts do not accentuate those attributes of God which are beneficial for His image to be seen by the world.

The use of the terms *image* and *likeness* are also instructive in this discourse. The image of God we see in the text is one of unity; therefore mankind, and particularly the body of Christ, ought to be a physical demonstration of this image and likeness of unity.



This is especially true since the origin of the division in the body of Christ can be traced to the beginning. The Fall shifted man from his esteemed privileged position as a member of the Divine Community into a place of contempt against it.

The Fall separated humans from their Creator and began to pave the way for a most contentious relationship among humans, as well as a hostile relationship with God and all his creation. This condition of hostility resulting from sin continues as a pervasive problem among humans both inside and outside of the church. However, the church, Christ's body, which is the redeemed community, should make every effort to replicate the vision of unity in a world severely wounded from the effects of the Fall, notwithstanding, the fact that it is comprised of peoples from various ethnic groups, nationalities, ages, and other sociological conditions.

The pollution of sin in humans means they no longer possess the original goodness with which they were created. In its place has come a perversity which controls their hearts, minds, dispositions, and wills.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, although the church has preached a message of separation from sin, the effects of sin have continually affected relationships both inside and outside the church. However, many church leaders do not place the same emphasis on the sins which evoke disunity and dissensions within ecumenical relationship as they do to other forms of transgressions; instead, they often find ways of applying biblical passages to justify divisive actions.

This biblical and theological review will examine the way the subject of ecumenism has been juxtaposed alongside biblical underpinnings by both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals. This will be done through regular consultation with the Bible. The

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Kuehner, "Fall of Men, An Historical Event," in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rea, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 588.

goal is therefore to create a pathway for harmony among church leaders in response to Jesus' prayer of John 17.

Earlier I mentioned the concept of unity which exists within the Trinity as an important reference point for the church today. However, the unity between God and humans was severely disrupted by sin. Sin is a human problem which has afflicted all those born after Adam (Rom 5:12, 14). We see clearly how sin affected not only Adam's relationship with God, but also with Eve; he blamed her for the condition they found themselves in (Gen 3:12). The problem did not stop there, however, as we see later that because of sin, the sons of Adam and Eve became embroiled in sibling rivalry. Consequently, Cain killed his brother Abel, and the first instance of murder was recorded in the Bible (Gen4:1-8). These actions marked the downward spiraling of relationship and paved the way for divisions within human relations throughout history.

The Fall and its consequential actions demonstrated the role that sin would play in both the horizontal and vertical relationships of humans. According to John Goldingay, "Genesis 1-11 as a whole offers a total picture of the origins of human wrong-doings, and it is only by Genesis 8:21 that God concludes that human wrong doings is not only pervasive (5:5, 11-12) but inevitable."<sup>2</sup> Having stated that observation, however, Goldingay acknowledged that humanity is also capable of better things, as was demonstrated in the testimony regarding Noah as being a righteous man.<sup>3</sup> In both the Fall caused by Adam and the murder done by Cain, we see the deleterious impact that sin has on humans; in fact, the relationship between God and his creation became so sour that

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<sup>2</sup> John Goldingay, "Genesis 3 and the Fall," in Leslie C. Allen, *A Theological Approach to the Old Testament: Major Themes and New Testament Connections* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 649.

<sup>3</sup>Goldingay, "Genesis 3 and the Fall," 649.

God had to take drastic actions to punish them. Genesis records the judgment of God by a flood which destroyed the earth leaving only those who entered the ark (Gen 10).

The post-flood era presents us with an interesting situation that is worth exploring in the advancement of ecumenical arguments. This was the period when the inhabitants of the earth decided to construct a tower reaching to the heavens (Gen 11:4). According to Fred E. Young, the writer of Genesis sees the “Tower of Babel as a symbol of human pride and ambition, and said it was destined to fall even before it was finished.”<sup>4</sup> The goal of constructing a city where this tower would be built was to prevent the population from being dispersed all over the earth (Gen 11:4). This was not God’s design for humans.

It can be argued that this intention of the people was unwise, especially since they declared that they wanted to make a name for themselves (Gen 11:4). However, what the Lord said in response to this intention is instructive to the church. The Lord commented that the people are one. He further noted that whatever they made up their minds to do they will accomplish; therefore, since the project was not in accord with his will, he caused it to end. This was done by confusing their language, which according to Young was the explanation by the author of Genesis for the “origin of various languages in the human race.”<sup>5</sup>

In God’s pronouncement to create man, where he said “let Us” (Gen 1:26), we see him using the same term again in Gen 11:7. Therefore we see the united Divine Community at work in the de-establishing of a misguided united human community. The lesson to be learned from this narrative should not be one which promotes divisions but rather one which promotes a motive for unity around the right purpose. This was

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<sup>4</sup> Fred E. Young, “Tower of Babel,” in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rea, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 187.

<sup>5</sup>Young, “Tower of Babel,” 187.

demonstrated in the construction of the wall by Nehemiah: it was stated that the wall was built because the people had the mind to work (Neh. 4:6). Nehemiah was doing God's work.

Another evidence of unity in the Old Testament is the fact that God used the descendant of one man to establish a nation. The "Old Testament Israel is descended from the one Father, . . . although the tribes are [were] later divided."<sup>6</sup> God, however, retained leadership through Moses as the supreme leader not only for one tribe but also for the entire community. In placing Moses as the leader of Israel, God did not abandon his theocratic role in the life of the community, as it was from God that the directives would emanate, and in times of crises which threatened the unity of the community, God would be present to help his delegated leaders.

The benefits of unity and the consequences of disunity are therefore evident in other Old Testament texts. These two realities are imbedded in the exodus of the children of Israel to the Promised Land. In preparing Israel for deliverance from Egypt, the Lord commanded Moses to instruct the children of Israel to keep the Passover lamb until the same day when the whole community would slaughter them at the same time (Ex 12:6). Undoubtedly, God could have required each family to kill and eat its lamb at a time convenient to them; however, God's instruction was for it to be done together starting at twilight, and this fact is worthy of notice. Douglas A. Stewart posits that twilight meant there would be enough time for preparation of the animal of the Passover meal.<sup>7</sup> This

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<sup>6</sup> G. W. Bromiley, "Unity," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1127.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 275.

meant that the reason for them to eat at that time was carefully considered by God, and this was important for the whole community to understand.

The command to the Israelites from the Lord through Moses at the beginning of their formation as a nation would play a role as they traversed the wilderness. This was shaping up to be a treacherous journey which required that the community remain united throughout. This unity would be tested throughout the journey, starting at their first major obstacle—the Red Sea crossing (Ex 14). This was a major challenge for Moses the leader, but having the experience of God’s power at work in Egypt Moses knew that God would not allow the pursuing Egyptians to re-enslave them but would make a way for them to reach their long-awaited freedom. As the children of Israel prepared to cross the Jordan, again they were required to prepare themselves as Joshua commanded them to cross the river Jordan. Throughout the wilderness journey, the unity of the Israelites was critical to their success both in times of conflict and in time of war. However, unity was not always the case, as many times they experienced defeat resulting from divisions within the community.

### **The Effect of Disunity in Mission**

The children of Israel were excited to leave Egypt, the place of their oppression. Clearly, the Israelites did not expect to enter into the difficulties which characterized the journey, and perhaps they misunderstood how the new freedom was now consequential to their obedience to God. However, Stuart posits that the children of Israel were being freed from a bad master to become subject to a good Master.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the people had to learn how to follow and respect Moses as God’s delegated authority, and Moses

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<sup>8</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 35.

needed to learn how to conduct himself in like manner with regard to the people he was leading. Consequently, tension ran high within the camp and resulted in many conflicts.

Miriam, sister of Moses, found herself in trouble with God when she, along with Aaron, the brother of Moses, challenged the authority of Moses (Num 12). Miriam sinned when she was insubordinate to God's will and incited Aaron against Moses and then led the obvious rebellion against Moses. She and Aaron objected to His prominence and respected position, resulting in God's judgment. Miriam was struck with leprosy and banished from within the camp even though Moses, described in the text as being "very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (Num 12:3), interceded for her.<sup>9</sup> Yet, God insisted that she remains outside the camp and in her condition for a while. When Aaron saw what happened to Miriam, he repented and pleaded to Moses for forgiveness (Num 12:11-12). However, this was not the end of Moses' problem with divisiveness, and he would soon face even greater challenges.

The rebellion of Korah made Miriam's actions seemed insignificant. Korah, "a descendant of Levi through Kohath and Izar and younger contemporary of Moses decided to oppose Moses (Ex. 6:16, 24; Num. 16:1 ff.; 1Chron.6:22)."<sup>10</sup> George Turner continues to point out that Korah's revolt against Moses and Aaron "was inspired by envy according to the account in Numbers 16, 17."<sup>11</sup> Korah, along with Dathan and Abiram and their followers, felt that they should confront Moses and Aaron to challenge the unique role given to them by God in the community by seeking to elevate themselves. This caused a severe rift within the community as accusations and propaganda were

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<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

<sup>10</sup> George A. Turner, "Korah," in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rea, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 999.

<sup>11</sup> Turner, "Korah," 999.

hurled at Moses and Aaron accusing them of breach of promise, selfishness, and incompetence. By doing this, “Korah had enlisted the sympathy of the entire congregation so that Moses and Aaron were virtually alone.”<sup>12</sup>

This episode was a defining moment for Israel, not only for mission but also for the very existence of the community. Turner identified “four groups in this dramatic confrontation: Moses and Aaron and the 70 elders of Israel; Korah, Dathan and Abiram with their families were separate from all the rest; the 250 Levites with rival Censers were in a group by themselves; and the rest of the congregation stood in a distance looking on. The challenge was for God to vindicate by divine judgment, those who were on His side.”<sup>13</sup> It can be determined by the judgment that the divisive behavior was displeasing to God; the earth swallowed up the three rebel leaders and their families, and fire from the Lord consumed the 250 rebels with censers (Num 16:28-35).<sup>14</sup>

Within the New Testament, the Corinthians stand out as a divisive church among the churches that Paul addressed. John Polhill reports the Corinthians as “divided, and some even challenged Paul’s apostolic authority.”<sup>15</sup> Polhill adds that the situation deteriorated to the point where Paul “seems to have been personally assaulted by at least one person . . . thus leaving in haste and frustration” and resulting in him penning Second Corinthians.<sup>16</sup>

However, Paul addressed the matter of divineness when he wrote to the Corinthians, as we see in 1 Cor 3. He rebuked them for their behavior (1 Cor 3:3), describing them as carnal, immature, and divisive (1 Cor 3:1-3). This was because the

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<sup>12</sup> Turner, “Korah,”999.

<sup>13</sup> Turner, “Korah,” 1000.

<sup>14</sup> Turner, “Korah,”999.

<sup>15</sup> John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville, TN: Broadman& Holman, 1999), 230.

<sup>16</sup> Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 230.

church had embraced sectarianism rather than unity. Their apparent division over leadership did not sit well with Paul, even though there were members who apparently assigned themselves to Paul himself. Paul was quick to point out to them that credit for God's work did not belong to him or Apollos, but rather to God, who blesses his own work (1 Cor.3:6-7).

The Corinthian church is a good microcosm of the modern church with all its moving parts which seem unable to coordinate. Polhill points out that the magnitude of the problem was not only the internal disunity but also their challenge to Paul's apostleship.<sup>17</sup> With this said, it is obvious that the Corinthians' challenge to Paul's leadership follows the same pattern of Moses' opposition. Dissention about leadership has been a challenge to the mission of the church historically, and it is still one of the issues fueling the proliferation of independent churches and various spiritualities across Jamaica.

### **The Prayer for Unity**

G. W. Bromiley posits that the word *unity* "is very rare in the Bible, but the thought behind the term, that of the one people of God, is extremely prominent."<sup>18</sup> This idea of unity was commended by the psalmist when he declared, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps 133:1). Bromiley also identifies the concept of unity when God states to Ezekiel, "As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: 'For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.' Then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim,

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<sup>17</sup> Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 233-34.

<sup>18</sup> Bromiley, "Unity," 1127.



and for all the house of Israel, his companions.’ Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand” (Ezek37:16-17).

In continuation of Bromiley’s argument on unity, he adds that in “the N[ew] T[estament] this unity is expanded in accordance with the original promise of God. The wall of partition between the Jews and Gentiles and indeed between Greeks and barbarian, bond and slaves, male and female is broken down. Therefore, there is one people of God embracing men of all nations (Eph. 2:12-13; Gal.3:28).”<sup>19</sup> It is evident in the language of the Bible that God’s intention was for mankind to live in fellowship notwithstanding their diversity. This is possible because of what Paul describes as the “baptism into Christ” which subsequently leads the believer to “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). Therefore, those who have confessed Christ must take note that Jesus’ prayer for unity should not be ignored or taken lightly. Prayer for unity within the body of Christ should therefore be one of the essentials of church leaders, just as the Lord prayed prior to his ascension.

At the heart of ecumenism is the prayer of Jesus found in John 17. D. A. Carson posits that “in some respects the prayer is a summary of the entire Fourth Gospel to this point. Its principal themes include Jesus’ obedience to His Father, the glorification of His Father through His death/exaltation, the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, their mission to the world, their unity modeled on the unity of the Father and the Son, and their final destiny in the presence of the Father and the Son.”<sup>20</sup> These themes in the passage, as identified by Carson, appear different on the surface but are connected to the theme of

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<sup>19</sup> Bromiley, “Unity,” 1127.

<sup>20</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 551.

unity among the members of the body of Christ. This is so as one being accomplished in isolation from the others is practically impossible.

Craig Koester, commenting on John's Gospel, states, "The faith of individuals is integrally connected in the life of the community."<sup>21</sup> He highlighted this idea by pointing out that when "disciples like Andrew and Phillip come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, they gather others into a circle of believers (1:40-46). When the Samaritan woman begins wondering whether Jesus might be the Messiah, she brings her township to Him, and her people confess together that he is the Savior of the world (4:39-42)."<sup>22</sup> Koester adds that "people become part of the community because they believe, and being part of the community also enables people to believe."<sup>23</sup> The book of John is therefore a call from the Evangelist to advance the centrality of the Son of God in our faith, so that the world may believe in him and serve him as their King.

Jesus was always concerned that all his actions on earth would glorify his Father in heaven. Within the first line of his prayer as reported by John, one can observe this truth. Jesus called on his Father to glorify him the Son, that the Son may in turn glorify the Father (John 14:1). Jesus further stated, "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given me out of the world" (John 14:6). Jesus' prayer progressed in a manner which identified that his purpose in establishing the kingdom of God among those whom he had chosen was accomplished; in this regard he accounted in John 14:8 that they had received the word of God and they believed in Jesus and that he was sent by

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<sup>21</sup> Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 196.

<sup>22</sup> Koester, *Word of Life*, 196.

<sup>23</sup> Koester, *Word of Life*, 196.

God. In this statement Jesus is elevating the word of God as the main source of influence in the formation of this new ethos which he intended should permeate the earth.

According to Carson, “the danger from which Jesus is asking His Father to protect is real and urgent. He has given them His word and they obeyed it; that word is nothing less than the truth of the revelation of God.”<sup>24</sup> Like the disciples, the church is in a world hostile to many of their beliefs. Therefore it was important to Jesus for the disciples to anchor their faith on something which is trustworthy and infallible: the word he taught and modeled before them. Just as Jesus intended that the disciples should remain in him in order to live out their faith, so he requires that of us his followers today. The nature of the danger to which Carson alludes may be different, depending on one’s geographical location, but the threat to faith in God is still the object of its attack. Therefore, Jesus’ prayer for unity is an important reference point in the melee of ecclesial and clergy discord. The prayer will work better among churches and their leaders when their efforts are turned toward the common enemy rather than on each other. Here we find Paul’s instruction in Eph 6:12 to be timely.

By recognizing the enemy for who he is and identifying his strategies to divide and rule, the church will be better able to preserve the unity for which its Head prayed. The fact that Paul identifies two specific entities, the seen and unseen realms, tells us that the potential for conflict abounds. It is therefore important that conflicts that arise within the church are viewed through the right lenses so that the correct remedies may be applied to each conflicting situation.

Identifying the plethora of subentities within the unseen realm—principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, and spiritual host of wickedness (Eph 6:12)—makes Jesus’

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<sup>24</sup> Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 564.

prayer comes more alive. Jesus, himself being a member of the Trinity and knowing the value of unity, could expect nothing else from his followers than the same ethos which comprise him and the Father and the Holy Spirit. Paul's use of the word *wrestle* in the text connotes the idea of a constant struggle for territorial occupation within the spiritual and the natural realms. Therefore Paul wants readers to focus their energies on the common enemy, who is apparently not divided but is united in the pursuit to keep the church divided.

This idea of this united enemy is suggested in Jesus' response to the Pharisees who accused Him of casting out demons in the name of "Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (Matt 12:24), but Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?" (Matt 12:25-26). Jesus by making this statement is pointing to the fact that even within the kingdom of darkness there is unity. However, the Lord makes a further point that a divided kingdom cannot stand, but rather it will come to desolation. However, it is the same kingdom of darkness which is opposing the kingdom of God and causing divisions among the churches. This observation therefore gives clarity to the emphasis the Lord places on unity among his followers.

The inclusion of unity by the Lord in his prayer should mean more to the church community purporting to be his body. I concur with Carson that "Jesus prays that God will keep his followers in firm fidelity to the revelation of Jesus himself as mediated to them. The purpose of such faithful allegiance, Jesus avers, *is that they may be one as we*

*are one.*”<sup>25</sup> In further delineating this point C. K. Barrett “comments that the ‘disciples are to be kept by God not as units but as a unity’, but that slightly misses the point,” according to Carson.<sup>26</sup> Carson posits that the disciples “are not kept as a unity, rather their unity is the purpose of their being kept. They cannot be one as Jesus and the Father are one unless they are kept in God’s name, i.e., in loyal allegiance to his gracious self-disclosure in the person of his Son.”<sup>27</sup>

The argument that Carson is hereby advancing is one for revelation of God as a prerequisite for unity within the body of Christ. This is indeed an imperative as presented by the Evangelist when he declared, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In this we get the idea of a God who wants to be known by his people and who wants to know them. Disunity demolishes this divine imperative and reduces the body to a place of conflict and confusion. The prayer of Jesus should therefore be central to the ecumenical activities of the church. This will happen when its leaders value the *missio Dei* above personal or congregational agendas. Oneness should therefore be the hallmark of the church in today’s divided and segmented world in answer to the prayer of Jesus.

### **A Divided Church Cannot Unite a Divided World**

As I continue to advance biblical and theological positions for ecumenism, I cannot ignore the role the Holy Spirit plays in accomplishing this goal. One of the purposes of the Holy Spirit, as stated by Jesus, is to guide believers into all truth (John

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<sup>25</sup> Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 562.

<sup>26</sup> Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 564.

<sup>27</sup> Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 564.

16:13). However, believers from different groups are yet to find the truth common to the body of Christ. One of the most divisive doctrines which has been highlighted previously is the different opinions of the Holy Spirit. This is grossly ironic since the Holy Spirit is the one who is guiding believers into truth. The argument can therefore be made that where there is confusion the leading of the Holy Spirit may be obscured by elements of human and cultural interference.

Cultural, religious, and human biases are not uncommon in interpreting the divine message. Jesus spent his ministry working to demolish barriers steeped in centuries of traditions and deep-rooted cultures. The story of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman is a clear evidence of the depth of segregation caused not only by political circumstances but also by religion. Carson noted that "Samaria had no separate political existence in Jesus' day; it was united with Judea under the Roman procurator. Nevertheless for both Jews and Samaritans the area was defined by both history and religion."<sup>28</sup> The response of the Samaritan woman to Jesus' request for a drink of water (John 4:9) shows that although her moral conditions were far from ideal, her religious consciousness was intact. The disciples, unlike their Lord, demonstrated bias when they returned to see the Lord talking with the woman (John 4:27).

Peter was also affected by this unhealthy approach to the mission of God. This is evidenced in his response to the message contained in the vision he saw in Acts 10:9-16, as well as his behavior toward the Gentiles reported by Paul in Gal 2:11-16. By Peter's action of declaring segments of God's creation as unclean or by not wanting to socialize with the Gentiles for fear of criticism, it shows that human weakness is common even among great leaders in the church. In the vision recorded in Acts, note that the speaker is

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<sup>28</sup> Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 216.

the voice of the Lord, as identified by Peter himself (Acts 10:14), yet Peter thought it was acceptable to tell the Lord that his request was improper. This is such an irony when we examine the content of the message in Acts 2 preached under the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost when thousands of persons were converted.

We must not miss the point that when this first message was preached by the young church after the Holy Spirit descended on them in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-13). Peter was the messenger, himself being the subject of stratification. Being Galileans, the disciples were not considered among the classes and as such were not expected to produce the quality leadership which was displayed by them in Jerusalem (Acts 2:7-12). Compared with other groups, the Galileans “were common people.”<sup>29</sup> Earl Robinson further points out that “Galileans had different customs and simpler religious customs than the Judeans so that the term Galilean was a reproach used by the Pharisees. People outside Galilee had a poor opinion of Galileans and believed therefore that a prophet could not come from Galilee (cf. Jn 1:46; 7:41, 52).”<sup>30</sup> One would therefore expect that these men should be more mindful of how one’s socioreligious background can play a negative role in one’s life and seek to avoid being trapped by such a mindset.

The issue of demeaning a people was directed not only at the disciples but also to the Lord. John records Nathaniel questioning whether or not anything good could come from Nazareth after Phillip invited him to meet Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:44-46). Paul Haik describes Nazareth as an “insignificant place” which became popular only in the New Testament, it being the boyhood home of Jesus. Further rejection of Jesus was seen resulting from his humble earthly roots by the attitude of his own community. Luke 4:16-

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<sup>29</sup> Earl B. Robinson, “Galilean,” in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rea, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 649.

<sup>30</sup> Robinson, “Galilean,” 649.

30 documents the chilling scene of Jesus being driven from the synagogue because he declared his identity as the Messiah. The people could not appreciate the fact that someone whom they watched grow could become the Messiah.

Paul declared that Christ is the head of the church (Col 1:18; 2:10; 2:19; Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23) and that the church is his body (1 Cor 12:12; Eph 1:2). In this regard the grace which flows from the Head ought to affect the body. Paul advances this point when he said that “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:4-6). The frequent use in the passage of the word *one* emphasizes the need for the followers of Christ to embrace unity. It is for this reason that Paul admonished the Ephesians to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).

Bromiley argues that the unity in the New Testament “is not one of mere goodwill or common interests ecclesiastical or organizational”; he rather describes it as “a unity of expansion because of contraction. It is the unity in the one seed (Gal. 3:16) who has come as the true Israelite and indeed the second Adam (Rom. 5:12-13).” In this regard, therefore, “the old and estranged men are made one in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:15). The one Jesus is the basis of the unity of his people,” Bromiley opines.<sup>31</sup>

The centrality of Jesus is an important observation by Bromiley, since although many churches and denominations differ in many areas of doctrine, all churches hold to the headship of Jesus. They may differ in their day of worship, way of baptism, the constitution of the Godhead, or the view of Spirit baptism; however, there is little or no controversy concerning who is Jesus. “Yet if this unity is centered in Jesus Christ, it is

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<sup>31</sup> Bromiley, “Unity,” 1127.



necessarily a unity of the Holy Spirit. Believers have their new life in Christ as they are all born of the one Spirit (John 3:5, Eph. 4:4).”<sup>32</sup>

The church should therefore seek to respond to the Holy Spirit’s prompting toward unity and not continue to neglect this in pursuit of individualism. Jesus’ prayer indicates the tumultuous future for the church as the armies of the world unite their forces to demolish the church’s influence on their societies. In this regard, Jesus prayed not only for the protection of his followers but also that they may be one (John 17:11-12). The Lord had earlier warned of the tribulation which his followers would encounter (John 16:33), but he promised them peace in him. Jesus’ prophetic declaration is a clear and precise warning to the church that its survival in this world is linked to its dependence on the Holy Spirit as its uniting power.

This uniting power of the Holy Spirit is also evidenced in his outpouring on the day of Pentecost. We are told that the disciples were of one accord when the Holy Spirit fell on them in the upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-2). Following this, the ensuing events were clear: the power of the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples, though unlearned, to speak various languages to the amazement of the onlookers (Acts 2:5-12). The fact that the Holy Spirit used ordinary people to demonstrate the glory of God among skeptics demonstrates what the Lord can do where the right environment exists. This was a uniting work of the Spirit, unlike the divisive work of the post-flood generation’s humanistic spirit (Gen 11). Noah’s generation was more interested in building a tower to demonstrate their prowess and provide them the security of being united, but the Holy Spirit’s interest is very different in that his mission is the exaltation of Jesus and the

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<sup>32</sup> Bromiley, “Unity,” 1127.

propagating of the kingdom of God. The uniform language experienced by the post-flood generation is not the symbol of unity God desires for the church.

In this response to the Spirit's uniting power, the church must not run the risk of believing that unity is also uniformity. Instead, unity embraces variety, as it is the "one Spirit who gives different gifts (1Cor. 12:4-5)."<sup>33</sup> "The unity grounded in Christ leaves scope for diversity of actions and function, the only conformity being to the mind of Christ and direction of the Spirit."<sup>34</sup> Bromiley opined that the "unity received in faith must find expression in historical life and actions. There must be no antinomian acquiescence in divided or competitive Christian bodies. To this extent it is right and necessary that there should be an active pursuit of practical unity."<sup>35</sup> This means "we must serve our brothers and sisters outside our . . . sub-culture by taking initiatives and serving as catalysts towards fulfillment of Jesus' prayer in John 17. For if we truly believe that the unity of believers is a prerequisite for the effective fulfillment of the Great Commission . . . the ecumenical responsibility for us is a given."<sup>36</sup>

Raymond R. Pfister opines that "the Twenty First Century has been referred to as the century of the Holy Spirit and has millions of lives affected by the Pentecostal and Charismatic renewal." He explained that "men and women came from various ecclesiastical backgrounds, yet all believed that God moved sovereignly by the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of humans, bringing new life and revival."<sup>37</sup> This new life to which Pfister alludes is that which is experienced by those who have been reconciled to

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<sup>33</sup> Bromiley, "Unity," 1128.

<sup>34</sup> Bromiley, "Unity," 1128.

<sup>35</sup> Bromiley, "Unity," 1128.

<sup>36</sup> David L. Cole, "The Future Ecumenical Challenges—Holy Spirit Empowerment in the Twenty-First Century: Ecumenical Challenges," in *Spirit-Empowered Christianity in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Vinson Synan (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2011), 256.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond R. Pfister, "Ecumenism of the Spirit," in *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Ecumenical Documents and Critical Assessments* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 66.

the Lord through the cross (Eph 2:16) and empowered by the Holy Spirit; thus they are required to live in their world as witnesses of the power of Christ.

### **Toward a Culture of Ecumenism**

According to Donald Roberts, “in the prayer of Jesus we get the understanding of His mind concerning the distinction and differences between the disciples and people of the world (vv14, 16). He placed the disciples at stark contrast, and bold relief to the people of the world.” Roberts continues to opine that by doing so, the Lord placed his disciples “as models of a unity that the world would do well to follow.”<sup>38</sup> Pfister asks the question of Pentecostals, “what kind of ecumenical commitment can be drawn from the prayer of Jesus in John 17: 21-22? How can unity and legitimate diversity in the church be accounted for when dealing with other churches like the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches?”<sup>39</sup> Pfister is of the opinion that this is achievable when Pentecostals and charismatics acknowledge that “in each Christian community the Holy Spirit has been active even during the centuries of separation.”<sup>40</sup>

Acknowledging others’ spiritual distinctives is an important admonition to Pentecostals who brand themselves as being ecumenical in nature. It also important to the church in general for it to experience the glory for which the Lord prayed. Another important value is the evidence that it will provide of the church’s connection to the headship of Jesus. Therefore, submitting to the Holy Spirit’s power in ecumenism is the only medium through which the church will experience true unity. Consequently, both

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<sup>38</sup> Donald Roberts, *The Certainty of Your Salvation: A Biblical Response to Sabbath – Sunday Controversy* (Kingston, Jamaica: DATEM [The Development Agency of the Teaching Ministry], 2014), 238.

<sup>39</sup> Pfister, “Ecumenism of the Spirit,”74.

<sup>40</sup> Pfister, “Ecumenism of the Spirit,”74.

among leaders and laity, there must be respect and recognition for the work of the Holy Spirit in the universal Christian church. The church should be mindful to remember the question of Paul to the Corinthians: “Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor 1:13).

According to Allan Killen the goal of unity is the “fulfillment of David’s Psalm extolling the excellencies of brotherly unity (Ps. 133:1 ff.) . . . Paul urges the believers at Philippi to recognize Christian unity by being of the ‘same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose’ (Phil 2:2, NASB). It becomes possible when each has the attitude of humility which was characteristic of Christ (Phil 2:3-5).”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, Christ’s plan to present the church to himself as “a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”(Eph 5:27) will not be thwarted by powers, principalities, or spiritual wickedness in heavenly or earthly realms.

We saw evidence of this great unity during the events of Pentecost. Although the disciples were being ridiculed, they stood together to proclaim the witness of Christ. It was also a time of great progress for the young church, as Peter’s message about Christ resulted in “about three thousand [being] added to their number that day” (Acts 2:4). The text tells us of the great joy that enveloped the church as its members continued to proclaim the name of Jesus and to have fellowship, and that “all who believed were together, and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44).

It was also a time of miracles for the early church as people who were bound by infirmities were set free from the powers of Satan (Acts 3:1-16). Although this sparked backlash from the religious establishment, the apostles were undeterred, knowing that

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<sup>41</sup> Allan Killen, “Unity,” in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rea, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 1757.

they had been empowered by the Holy Spirit as witnesses of Jesus. This goes to show that when the Holy Spirit is allowed to work in the lives of people, and when Christ rather than one's personal or ecclesial agenda is central, unity is possible and people will experience transformation.

Paul's proclamation of a glorious church, free from human failings, is amplified in the vision John experienced. In that vision, John describes the church as a wife adorned for her husband. Here we are told of excitement and expectation in heaven: "let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints"(Rev 19:7). It is when the church becomes more subject to the Holy that there will be a realization of that which Paul proclaims.

Therefore, as the church on earth pursues the righteousness to which the apostle refers, its members should be conscious of their ultimate goal. In Rev 19:7, John speaks of fine linen as the righteousness of the saints. According to Robert Mounce, "the church, espoused to Christ by faith, now awaits the *parousia* when the heavenly groom will come for His bride and return to heaven for the marriage feast that lasts."<sup>42</sup> However, those who ignore the Holy Spirit's prompting for unity will be left to the establishing of their personal kingdoms, fit only for earthly good.

Consequently, the passage in Revelation places great importance on the church aligning itself with God's expectation of righteousness in preparation for its glorification for which the Lord prayed (John 17:22). In accomplishing this, Paul's expose of the

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<sup>42</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 347.

attributes of a glorious church should be kept as its ecumenical focus. It is therefore this desire that should propel us toward building ecumenical relationships, since in its glorified state the congregational and doctrinal segregations we are accustomed to will not have any place to exist in the new Jerusalem.

Judging from a scene recorded in Rev 7, the distinguishing mark for citizens of heaven will be common among all those living in the New Jerusalem. In heaven, John reports a great immeasurable multitude “from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne . . . of God” (Rev 7:9). According to Mounce, “the immeasurable multitude includes . . . all the faithful of every age.”<sup>43</sup> It is noteworthy that no mention was made of a particular church or ministry; rather, everyone is described as a “great multitude.” There is no evidence from what John saw that heaven will position people on pedestals based upon their church affiliations or ministerial accomplishments.

This reality may be discomfiting for some church leaders and their members who are fixated on titles and brands; however, as we see in the text, all attention according to John was on the occupant of the throne, the Lamb. The Lamb at the center of activities ensured that the mood in heaven is unlike the chaos when the church gathers on earth. It was a mood of celebration as the multitude with one voice proclaims the glory and majesty of Christ. However, “it is because they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ that the multitude is able to stand before the throne” and for no other reason. Christ is the central theme of the church on which everyone agrees most.<sup>44</sup>

The Holy Spirit therefore has consistently prompted the church to focus on Christ; however, the need for self-glorification and self-absorption has over time gotten the

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<sup>43</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 161.

<sup>44</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 165.

better of the church. This posture of the church was warned by Christ, who describes his position to the “Laodiceans” (Rev 3:14) as one standing at the door knocking (Rev 3:20).

### **Conclusion**

The need for ecumenism derives from the continuous and rapid divisions within the church over centuries. However, this culture of divisiveness did not start in the church age but has its origin in Satan (Is. 14:12-21) and manifested in Fall. The sinfulness of humans separated them not only from their Creator but also from one another. Therefore, throughout the Bible and throughout church history, we encounter humans as being incessantly divisive. This resulted in death and separation and often provoked the wrath of God. The Bible does provide evidences of unity, however short-lived these may be. The issues of humanity impact unity, making it fragile.

However, in this milieu of ecclesial and varying personal spiritualities, the church is being beckoned by the Holy Spirit to respond to his prompting to seek a better relationship among them in order to respond to the Great Commission. In this regard, Jesus’ prayer for the unity of the church must guide the relationships they share among themselves. This culture of unity is evident in the existence of the Divine Community and will be the feature of the New Jerusalem.

Therefore, as the church seeks to prepare for the Lord’s return and to proclaim the kingdom of God to the world, it should not allow petty differences to hinder its work; rather, it should be deliberate in its quest for unity which can be achieved through the establishing of ecumenical relationships. This is one work the Holy Spirit is no doubt

doing among the churches as he seeks to fulfill the prayer of the Lord and the vision of Paul for a glorious church.



## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT DESIGN

When I became a pastor in the COGOP in 1999 in St. Catherine East, I began to discover that for me to function in that town, not only was it necessary for me to associate with my denominational colleagues, but also it was important for me to form relationships with other church leaders. This realization led me to seek membership in the local Ministers' Fraternal which I have been attending since then. This was indeed an eye-opening experience for me since the spirituality of the group was so different from what I was accustomed to in my denomination. For instance, the confrontations over administrative and procedural issues in the meetings caused me to believe that some of the ministers lacked humility. However, I kept on attending and participating nonetheless because I believe I wanted to contribute to the organization.

There are other reasons why I kept on attending the Fraternal meetings with all the challenges as I saw in it: I felt that I needed to demonstrate my commitment to Christian unity; I saw how God could use me to help to foster Christian unity; I needed to build partnerships for social engagement, and I believed it was important for me to understand the behavior of other church leaders if I was going to work alongside them.

Since I consider myself an instrument of unity and reject divisiveness, it was therefore a natural progression for me as I advanced into leadership in COGOP, and I began to look more at the practice of the denomination regarding ecumenism to feel very uncomfortable with its state. I discovered that although the COGOP had made significant strides in moving away from its exclusivist culture in principle, there was still much to be

done in practice, especially nationally. This was always troubling for me, especially when I witnessed the absence of my colleagues from ecumenical activities.

As a supervisor of pastors, I took deliberate steps to encourage the pastors I supervise to be more involved in ecumenical activities in their local areas. I have consistently pointed out to them that this is necessary to advance the kingdom of God and strengthen the witness of the COGOP both locally and nationally. I therefore consider that for my encouragement to be taken seriously it was important for me to demonstrate this by the quality of my involvement as well. Consequently, I have continued with my Fraternal work and am currently the chairman. My interaction with this group has also influenced my ecumenical mindset and this thesis-project.

### **Population**

This ethnographical study was undertaken among pastors of the COGOP, St. Catherine East, Jamaica. This region comprises thirty-nine local churches located in a wide geographical space with both urban and rural profiles. These local churches have a collective membership of approximately five thousand people. The greater percentage lives in the urban areas of the parish, namely, Spanish Town and Portmore.

The pastors engaged in this project are both males and females. They range in ages from persons in their late thirties to early seventies. They are also pastors with varying levels of education; however, the majority of them, approximately 82%, do not hold a degree in a Christian discipline. Notwithstanding the low level of formal theological education, most of them have the basic training from the church's Bible school, New Covenant Bible Institute (NCBI), or its predecessors. The church has also

been consistent in leadership development activities for pastors through tracks such as, School of Practical and Advances Studies (SOPAS) and other training activities by the NCBI. These have been beneficial to those who participated in them.

From this cohort of pastors, four have already graduated from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) with a master of arts in religion (MAR), and at the time of this survey three are actively pursuing their master's degree from the same institution. Another six persons who started the program have faltered or did not continue from the pre-masters diploma stage. This was due to different reason including financial problems, lack of commitment, and change in focus (e.g., studying in an area that is more beneficial economically). There are other pastors who are in the minority who have demonstrated little or no interest in training. This is unfortunate because as was said before there is a sentiment among some other church leaders that the pastors of the COGOP are untrained and this may contribute to their lackluster approach toward ecumenism.

Many of the pastors in the parish are also bi-vocational. This is in some ways a hindrance to some of the ecumenical activities, as well as participation in training events. Those who are employed can be only available in the evenings, and sometimes when they arrive they are too tired for meaningful engagement. Pastors also must balance their time for families, parish, and national events, as well as their local church activities. Therefore, carving out time for other activities may not receive priority by them.

I expect that this study will therefore give a clearer and more accurate insight into the issues affecting the ecumenical relationships of the organization and assist the pastors to determine the measures they can take to help the church move on the frontline in Jamaica.

## **Quantitative and Quantitative Research Methodology**

The process used to develop the data found in this chapter was derived from the use of questionnaires and a focus group; in both modalities there are advantages and disadvantages. Of course any type of modality used to collect data shall possess its own sets of challenges. Jamaicans are very private and conservative when placed in circumstances of scrutiny. This may be due in part to a culture of political victimization where citizens who disclose their political preference could be considered to be placing themselves in danger. Hence, the highly secretive nature of Jamaicans makes it difficult for them to cooperate with any kind of data gathering. Even this activity could make them feel vulnerable.

Let me address first the issues that have to do with the use of questionnaires. With all good intention, a question posed can be wrongly interpreted by the responder. In this regard, the intent of the question could most likely be lost or at least changed. Respondents could also choose not to return the questionnaire or to return it late, which would likely put the project in jeopardy. Where the questionnaire requires the respondent to write the answers to the questions, illegibility of the writing could also cause valuable information to be lost. However, the questionnaire is still a good way to get feedback especially since it is done in anonymity. The issues that arose were not elements I was unprepared for; however, Brian Auday enlightened the subject for me in his Research Methodology course.

Regarding focus groups, it is always a challenge to interest people in attending meetings where they do not feel that they have an immediate stake. Another problem with focus groups is when participants have their own agenda and want to use the session

to delineate the same. In such cases one has to be keen on keeping the discourse on track lest the process falls into chaos. Focus groups, however, enable the researcher to not just hear what is being said, but also see the way that people react. The possibility of unearthing other important information that was not considered by the researcher is also a valuable benefit.

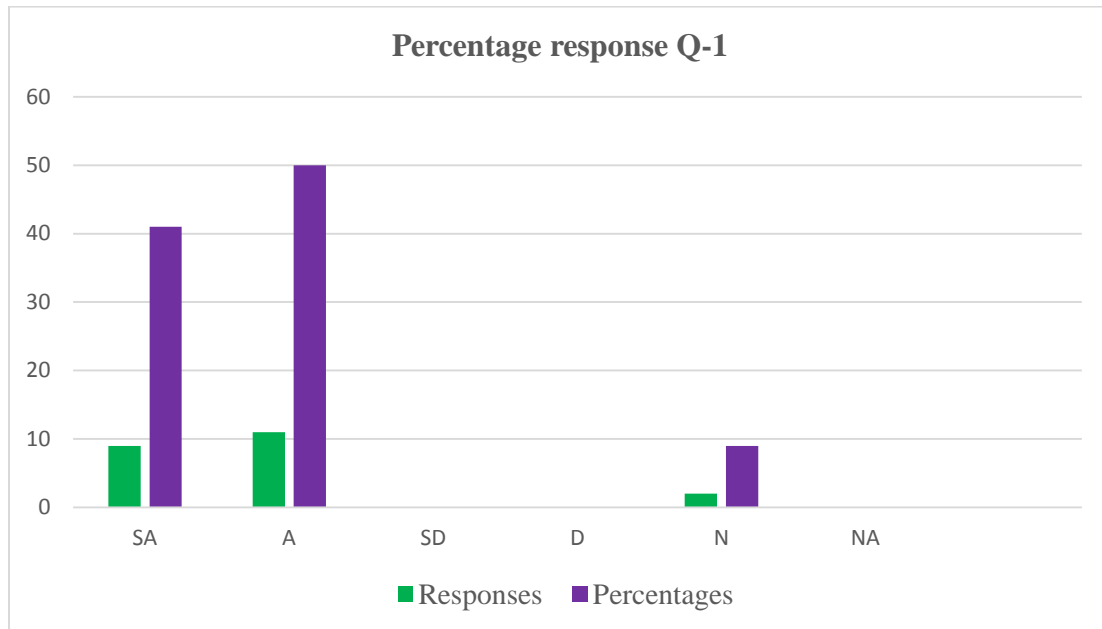
### **Presentation of Data and Analysis**

I wish to thank the pastors who have assisted me by making themselves available to participate in this important and enlightening activity. I am confident that the findings will serve to provide an invaluable resource for the COGOP in addressing the weakness in its ecumenical relationship in Jamaica, as well as other places. The church is also at a good place in its move toward ecumenism, and this work will help in furtherance of this action. Below are the findings from both the questionnaire and the focus group.

### **Responses to Questionnaires**

In commencing this exercise, I asked the pastors to answer the following question: “Ecumenism is promoting unity among church organizations; is this being promoted by the COGOP?”

**Figure 1: Percentage Response to Question 1**

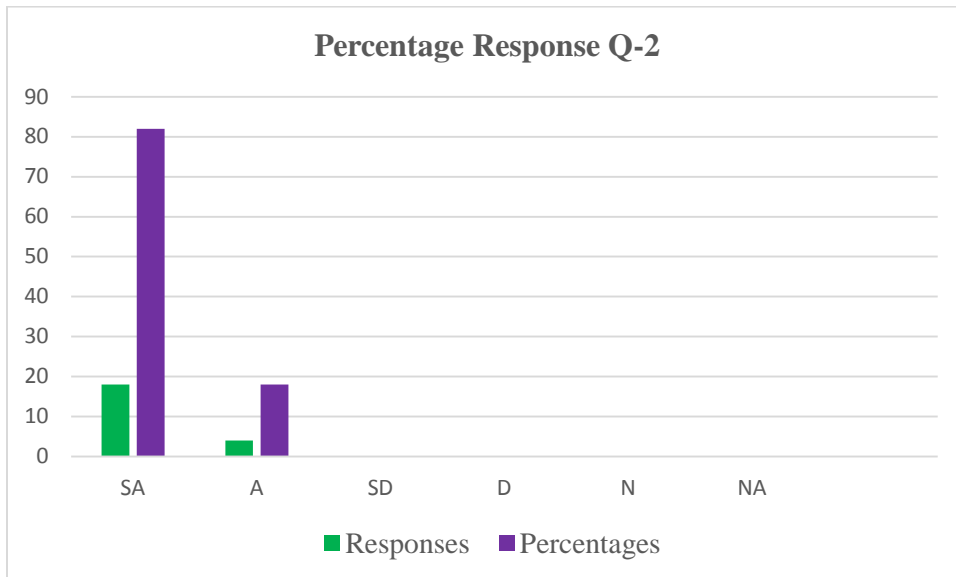


In response to this question, the results show that more of the pastors agreed with it than those who strongly agreed. However, an accumulated 91% of the pastors responded in the affirmative. There was a small amount, 9%, who were neutral, offering no opinion on this particular subject.

The responses could however be subjected to the pastor's exposure to the church's activities, or lack of it. It may also be a result of the pastor's perception of what the COGOP should be doing ecumenically as against what it is perceived to be doing in reality.

The pastors were then asked, "Do you think you should fellowship with ministers from other denomination?"

**Figure 2: Percentage Response to Question 2**

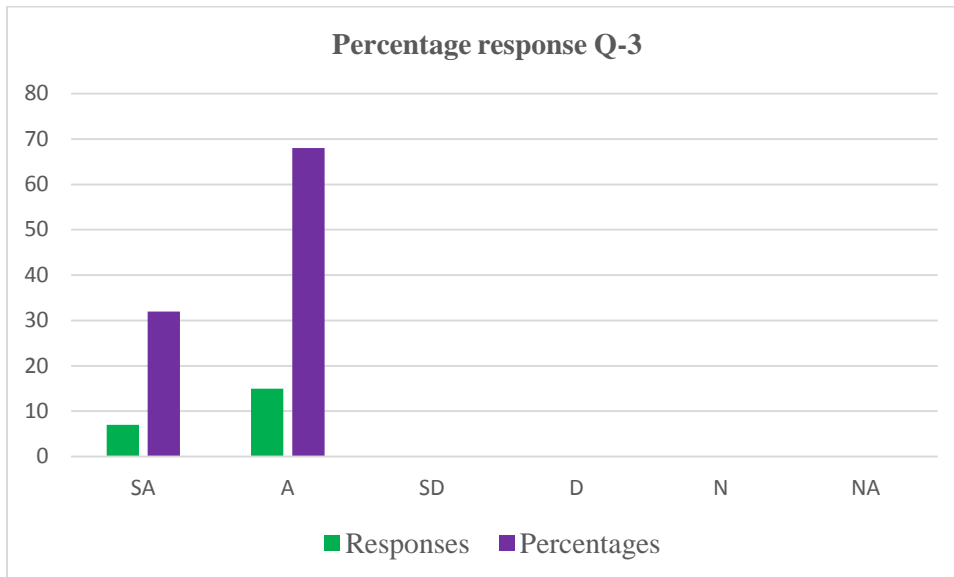


The response to this question with a 100% affirmation is noteworthy. It reveals that the pastors are moving away from being introverted and are accepting other Christian leaders as partners in the building of the kingdom of God.

This result shows that the pastors are thinking significantly differently from what was characteristic during the early history of the church, when leaders were warned to be careful of other Christian leaders (see chapter 1).

The participants were also asked, “Do you feel that a minister from another church organization should preach in your church?”

**Figure 3: Percentage Response to Question 3**



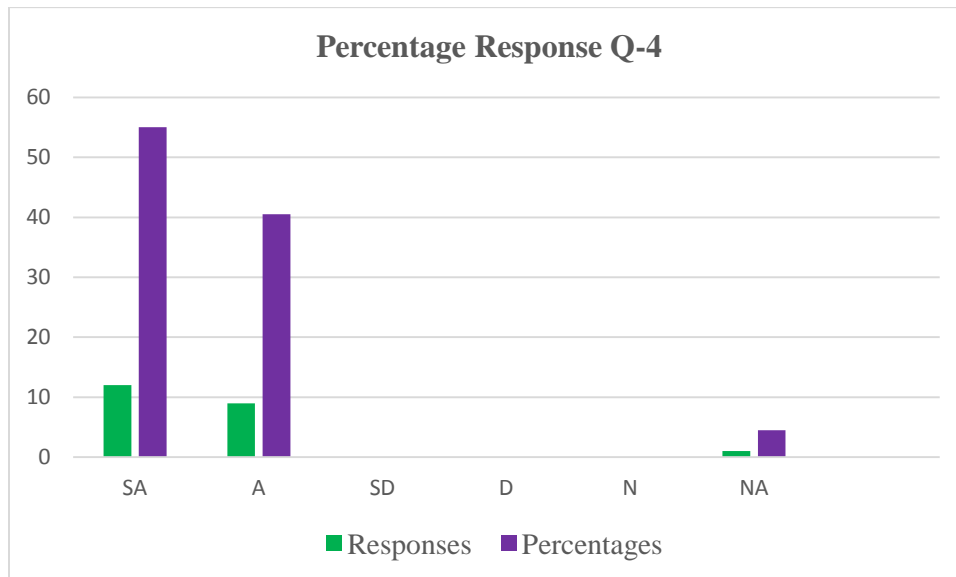
The responses to this question show that an accumulated 100% of the pastors accept that a pastor from another church should preach in their church. This is in keeping with the example set by the international body of the COGOP in receiving preachers from other church organizations to preach in the International General Assembly. The General Assembly is the most significant meeting of the church and receives delegates (members) from all across the world where the church is established.

The pastors are accustomed to visiting preachers in their national conventions and generally look forward to them. They are also exposed to other church leaders speaking to them in workshop and training events over the years as the church moves to a more inclusive organization. Therefore, all these indications could result in the pastors' comfort with receiving preachers from other churches in their individual congregations.



In this question, “Would you preach in another church organization?” I sought to understand the thinking of the pastors in relations to their willingness to preach in a church other than their own denomination. The response is as follows.

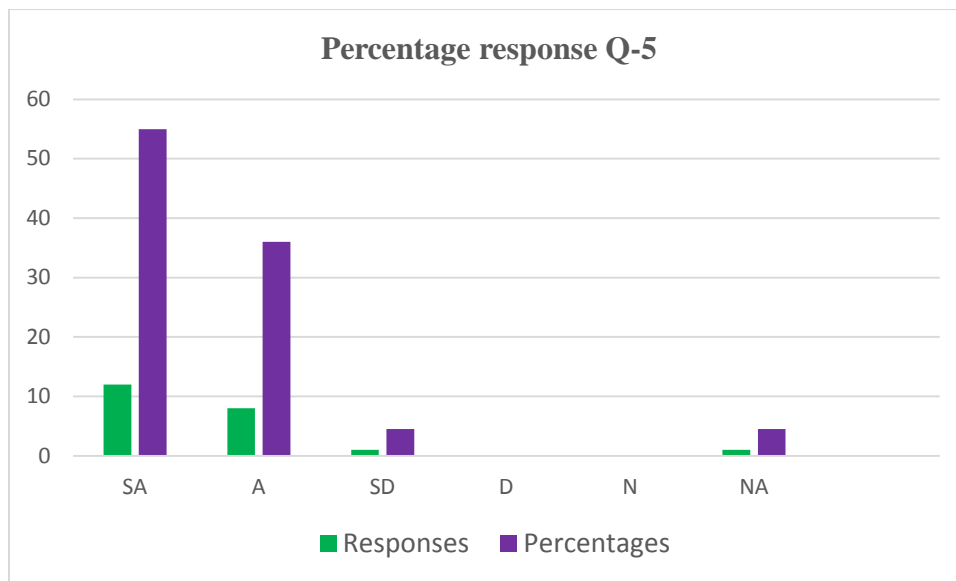
**Figure 4 Percentage Response to Question 4**



The graph shows that the majority of the pastors strongly agreed, while a slightly lesser number agree, making an accumulated total of 95% of the pastors who say they would preach in another church. There was a small number, 5%, who did not offer a response. This positive response continues to demonstrate that the way the pastors are thinking concerning their own ecumenical relationship is improving in the local setting.

Notwithstanding the overwhelming positive response to the two previous questions, there is still a sentiment among some Pentecostals that they are unwilling to preach in some churches where their traditions are not the same. I wanted to know “How comfortable the pastors felt about preaching in another church,” be it Pentecostal or non-Pentecostal.

**Figure 5: Percentage Response to Question 5**

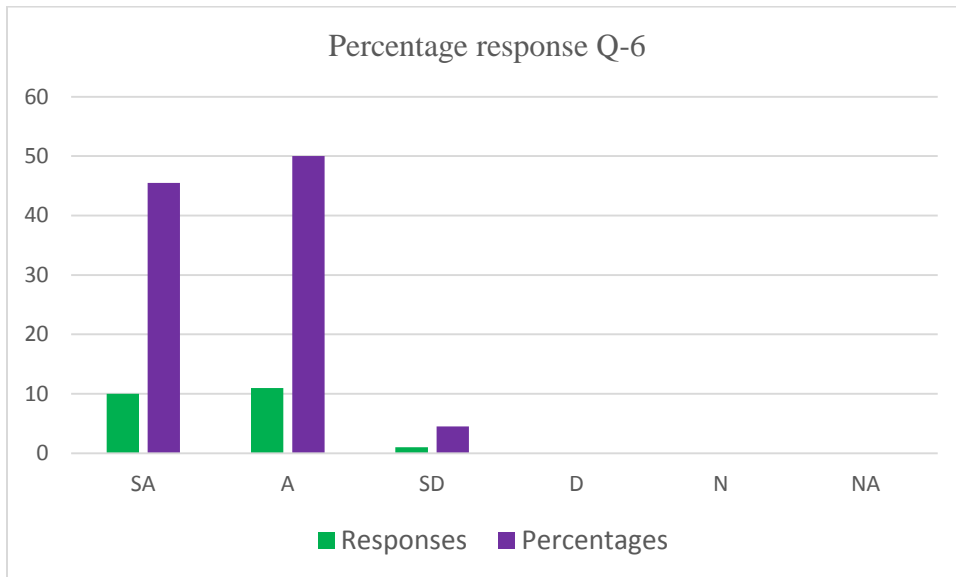


Although 91% of the pastors affirmed their comfort in preaching in another church, there remains a small number, 9%, who are either not comfortable or have not offered a response.

I find this response to be very different from the general way the pastors are when it comes to preaching even in their own conventions. Some pastors will express their discomfort in standing before an audience that is different from their own and will even appear to be very uncomfortable with the idea. It also begs the question as to why also more of the pastors are not preaching in ecumenical gatherings.

There are many factors that could affect the way pastors relate to each other or contribute to their level of participation in ecumenical activities, so I asked the pastors, “Do you feel that you are qualified to relate to other church leaders?”

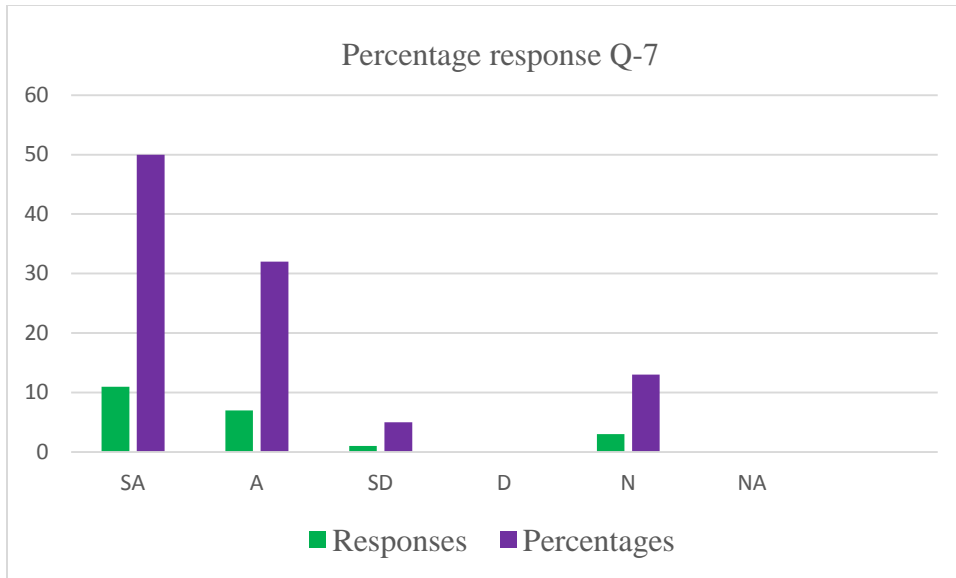
**Figure 6: Percentage Response to Question 6**



Many of the pastors agreed with the question, and a slightly smaller percentage strongly agreed, making a total of 90.5%. There was, however, a small percentage which strongly disagreed in the overall response. This is generally a good outcome from this question. It demonstrates the pastors within the COGOP are moving in the right direction in the way they perceive themselves in the ecumenical arena.

The pastors were asked, “Does the Church of God of Prophecy encourage ecumenical relationship?”

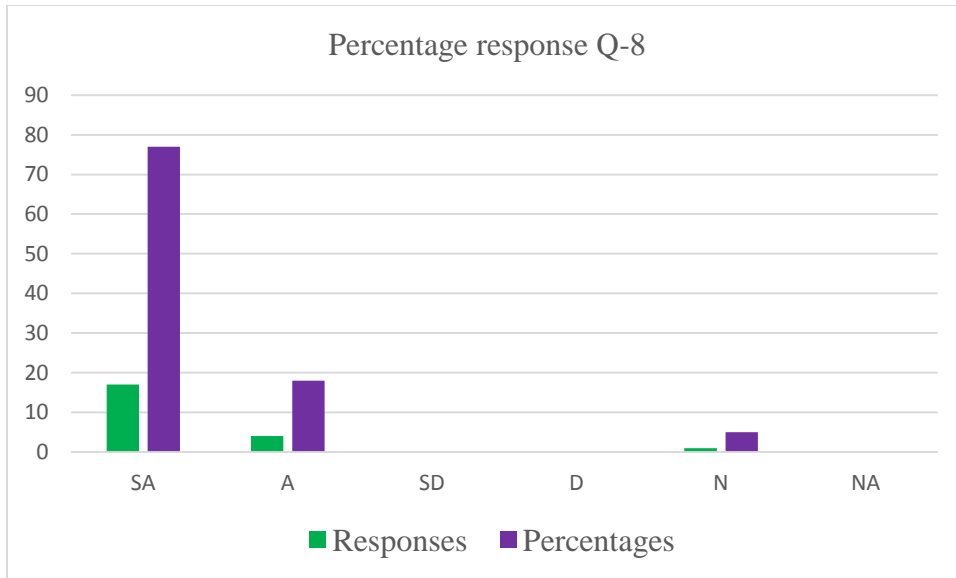
**Figure 7: Percentage Response to Question 7**



The response to this question is in keeping with the first, although there is difference in the weighting, meaning those who strongly agree and those who agree, the majority (82% of the pastors) see the church in a positive light concerning its utterances regarding ecumenism. Although a small percentage, 5% of the pastors, strongly disagree, and a slightly larger percentage, 13%, are neutral, it is important not to ignore that group.

I wanted to know whether or not the pastors view ecumenism as a biblical concept, so I asked, “Does the Bible teach about ecumenism?”

**Figure 8: Percentage Response to Question 8**

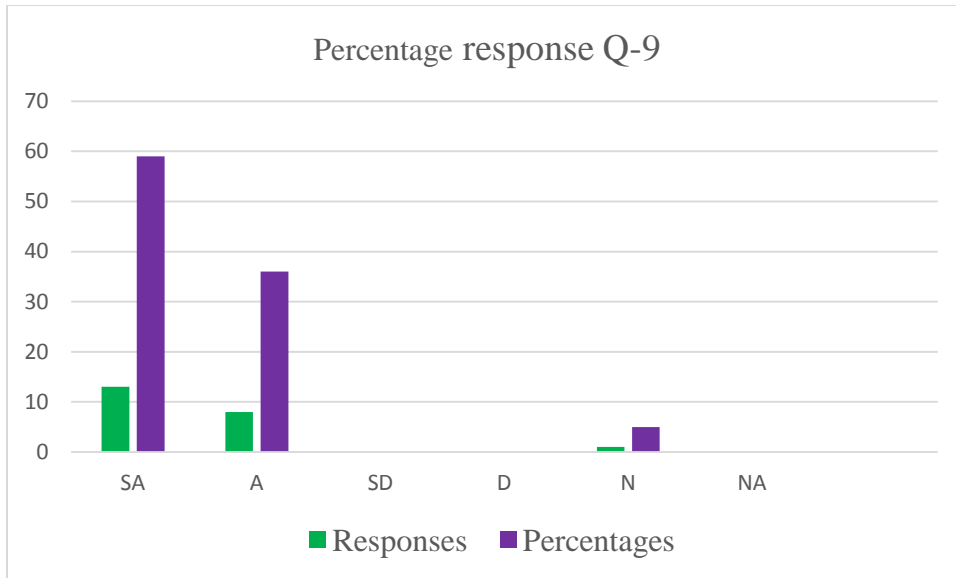


In response to this question, an overwhelming percentage (95%) acknowledged that the Bible teaches ecumenism. There were some who referenced Jesus’ prayer for unity found in John 17. This meant that the pastors have a good theological and biblical idea that ecumenism is endorsed by the Scriptures. This is also true with even a smaller number, 5%, that was neutral.

Overall, however, this response shows that the problem of lack of ecumenical engagement where it exists is not because of biblical ignorance, but rather some other concerns, which may be personal, cultural, or doctrinal issues.

Not only did I want to know whether the pastors thought that ecumenism was endorsed by Scriptures, I also asked them, “Do you believe that the Holy Spirit sanctions ecumenical relationship?”

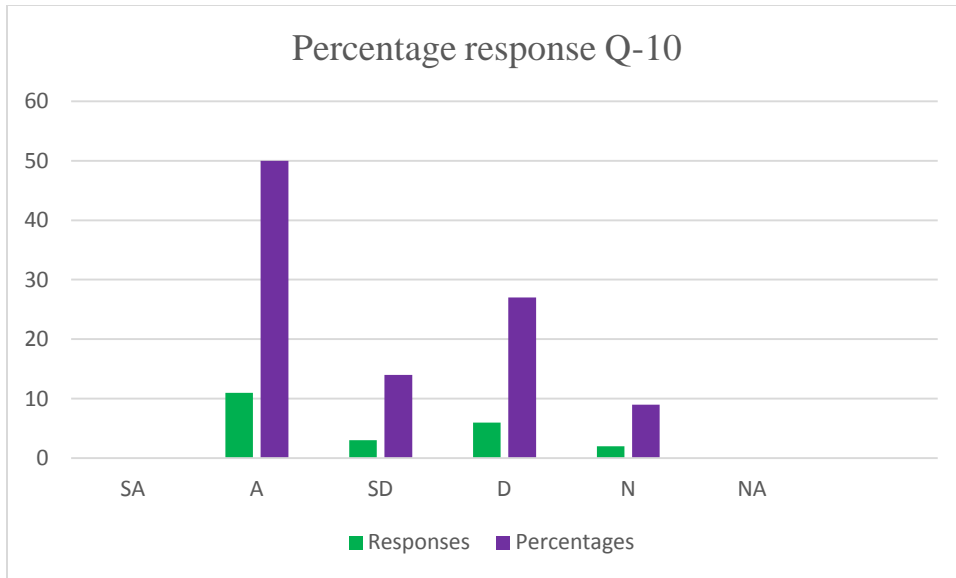
**Figure 9: Percentage Response to Question 9**



The combined number of pastors who affirmed this question is 95%. This is an important observation given the ecclesial construct of Jamaica with its diverse spirituality. There was, however, a minute number equaling 5% who are neutral.

Given the nature of the study, it was necessary for me to ask the pastors, “Do you believe that the COGOP is well represented in ecumenical activities?”

**Figure 10: Percentage Response to Question 10**

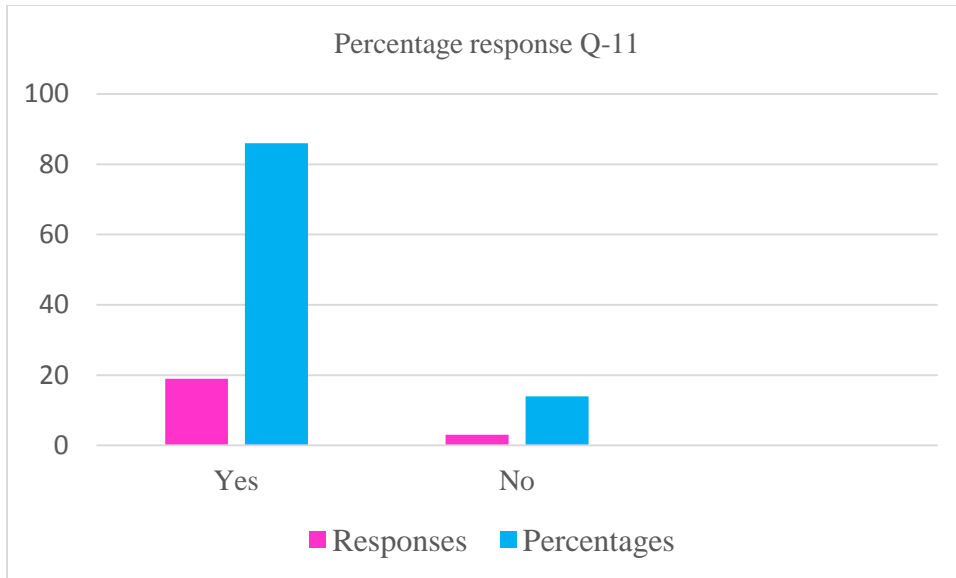


The response to this question is compelling. It is the only question that did not generate a strongly agreed response and with the most diverse responses. While 50% of the pastors agree with the question, a comparative large number, 41%, disagree, while another 9% remain neutral.

This response therefore highlights and bears out the concern I have postulated that the COGOP is not sufficiently seen by its members as an ecumenically involved church. Although this may be less true than the wider perception, the mixed result from the study shows that there is a need for the COGOP to advance itself in the ecumenical arena of the church to give its members the idea that it not only promotes ecumenism but also practices it effectively and consistently.

The pastors were asked, “Have you ever heard the term ‘ecumenical or ecumenism’ before?”

**Figure 11: Percentage Response to Question 11**



The main objective for asking this question was to determine the level of knowledge among the pastors of the term *ecumenism*. It was therefore no surprise that the majority, 86%, of the pastors were familiar with the term prior to my introducing it to them. There is a small percentage, 14% of the pastors, who never heard the term before; however, this does not mean that they are unfamiliar with the concept. This is evident in earlier responses where these pastors also engage in ecumenism, although this may not be their understanding of what they are doing at the time.

### Open-Ended Questionnaire

State Briefly Whether or Not You Consider Ecumenism to Be Important?

The respondents acknowledged that ecumenism is important to the church but pointed out that the lack of ecumenical relationships demonstrates the church's misunderstanding of its kingdom character. They also stated that ecumenism witnesses to the world that as Christians we belong to the one family of God. It was felt that



ecumenism is also important as it will help the church in deciding how to respond to important national issues. The churches' ecumenical presence is seen as important to nation building, as no one denomination has all the answers to all the socio-religious issues that the community faces. Hence, a more united approach will unearth the collective wisdom and strength of the body of Christ.

In general, the respondents acknowledged that ecumenism is important, and it is an area that the COGOP should not be unwilling to participate in. It is seen as the best way to expand the kingdom of God and to present a compelling witness of Christ to the community. It is also the means by which the church will demolish Satan's kingdom, a task which a divided church will be unable to accomplish. In this regard, the COGOP must embrace other Christians as members of the body of Christ.

It was, however, suggested that while ecumenism is important, members should know what they believe so that they do not lose their individual church focus. In this statement lies the problem of trust, which is a main element of distraction from building ecumenical relationships. Pastors are concerned that too close association with other denominations could cause members to leave, thus weakening their church and building up another.

#### How Would You Describe Your Personal Ecumenical Relationship Within Your Community?

From some of the responses to this question, it appeared the pastors were struggling to give a response befitting their belief that ecumenicalism is important. The question is, if it is important why are they not more engaged in it? For instance, some of

the respondents list their engagement with non-church groups, an answer which does not fit the particular question. In other cases, the question is left blank, which further illustrates my point that it will appear inconsistent with one's belief not to participate in something one thinks to be important.

However, there were those respondents who were certain of the good quality of the ecumenical relationship they share with other church leaders. This was demonstrated by their explanation of the roles they play in Fraternals and other church groups. This demonstrates a high degree of an understanding of not just the importance of ecumenism on the part of these respondents, but more importantly their active involvement therein.

It is therefore important for the pastors to transfer their beliefs into action that will produce the desired outcome of the intention of ecumenism. This, by their own admission, cannot be accomplished outside of an ecumenical arrangement. Therefore, although the COGOP is a large denomination, its leaders must leverage the church's strength for the good of the advancement of God's kingdom.

#### What Would Prevent You from Fellowshiping with Another Minister from Another Church?

Approximately 60% of the respondents to this question cited doctrinal difference as the main reason that would adversely affect their fellowship with another minister. It was felt that if a belief such as speaking in tongues was being attacked, it would be grounds for the withdrawal of fellowship. Another specific doctrinal reference was related to the Sabbath and whether a Seventh Day Adventist would use ecumenical relationships as a way of advancing their doctrine about the Sabbath. Although no

specific mention was made regarding the Oneness Trinitarian tension, this was cited in the focus group as another area of ecumenical contention.

Another element of concern highlighted dealt with moral failure; pastors expressed their unwillingness to associate with pastors who demonstrate moral weakness, this view of 27% of the respondents. This group of pastors believes that possessing a sound character is very important in helping them to decide how to fellowship with other church leaders.

The remainder of the respondents cited the issue of time as their main impediment. Since many of the pastors who participated in the survey are bi-vocational, additional time would need to be allocated from family or other personal activities for ecumenical activities. However, included in this amount is 5% who felt that there was nothing to prevent them from participating in ecumenical activities.

It must be observed that none of the respondents felt that the church prevented them from participating in ecumenical activities. Hence, their level of participation was due directly to their personal spirituality.

#### Explain Briefly How You Feel When You Are Among Other Church Leaders?

The majority of the respondents, 86%, expressed no inhibition when they are among other church leaders. In general they commented that the feelings are fraternal and respectful. However, 14% expressed some amount of inhibition and discomfort.

### **Qualitative Study—Focus Group**

In furtherance of the investigation of my DMin thesis-project, I conducted a focus group. The six participants in the focus group were drawn from pastoral leaders in the COGOP St. Catherine East. The following are the questions and the responses from the focus group participants. I have summarized the response for easier presentation.

#### Explore the COGOP's Involvement or Lack of It in Ecumenical Activities

The discussions revealed that the COGOP over the recent years has been involved in more ecumenical activities through its participation in activities such as fundraising events and combined fasting services. However, the church still seems more concerned with being cautious as it relates to other activities. The pastors expressed that there has been growth in the COGOP compared with its historical past, although there is lack of initiative by it. It was noted that the church only responds to invitation. A question was raised as to why the COGOP, being a leading denomination in terms of its population, was not more involved in the recently held "Heal the Family, Heal the Nation" event in Kingston. This event is the brain child of a smaller church body compared with the COGOP; however, the organizers were able to capture the support of the wider church, government, and civil society.

The point was reiterated that the COGOP can learn from other churches despite its numbers. But beyond that is also the other benefits that can be derived within ecumenism. An example of this is how one pastor expressed his comfort among other church leaders even more than his denominational colleagues. In this regards, Members expressed their disappointment that more pastors are not taking leading roles in their local ministers' Fraternal or at least benefitting from its fellowship.

## Explore the Psychological Impediments and Perceived Socio-economic Inadequacies

### Affecting the Involvement of Pentecostal Leaders in Ecumenical Activities

There are different situations affecting the nature of not only leaders from the COGOP but also in the wider Pentecostal community. This is exemplified in an experience where Pentecostals leaders participating in the installation of an Anglican pastor refused to pray from their prayer book, as one pastor reported, choosing instead to go with their traditional free-flowing style. This did not help the ecumenical relationship because the Anglicans felt offended by their actions the reporter lamented.

It was also pointed out that in the event a Pentecostal is asked to preach in a non-Pentecostal church, some may feel unable or may be unwilling because they may not want to adapt to a preaching style other than their own. To this extent some COGOP pastors who are not used to preaching from a script or preach with punctuated *glossolia* may not preach in a church that does not have the same belief in the Holy Spirit's manifestation. Therefore it is felt that one of the issues that Pentecostal leaders must overcome is the fear of ministry outside of their natural environment.

Another area of discussion was the fact that too many pastors in the COGOP are bi-vocational. Many of the ecumenical activities happen during the time when these pastors are at work; consequently, they are unable to participate. It was the view that these bi-vocational pastors may not have the time to prepare effectively to contribute to ecumenical dialogue. It was however felt that there are other activities held in the evening or at nights that bi-vocational pastors could participate in. Therefore, pastors should not use their bi-vocational status as an excuse not to participate in ecumenical activities.

## What Role Do Doctrinal Beliefs Play in the Way Pentecostal Leaders Engage Ecumenically?

The participants recognized that beliefs are significant in ecumenical relationship; therefore, one has to be able to determine the level of tolerance he or she possesses before engaging with other church leaders. This is necessary because there are those who would like to impose their beliefs on others, which could cause the relationship to be threatened. Therefore, it was suggested that when someone is invited to ecumenical gatherings, the individual should research the organizers of the event to ensure that their value systems are not contrary to what he or she believes.

However, concerns were raised as to how widely should these ecumenical relationships extend. For instance, it was stated that developing such relationships with groups outside of the mainline Christian context is not something to pursue. One such group is the Revivalist Movement, some of whose beliefs are contrary to that of mainline Christianity. However, while dissenting on ecumenical relationships with Revivalists, other churches, such as the Roman Catholics, that have practices different from Pentecostals were not treated in the same manner. One participant pointed out that another challenge also exists where Apostolic or Oneness did not respond favorably to ecumenism, even though they continue to benefit from it in the community.

The participants, however, felt that if someone is well trained and is spiritual, participating in ecumenical activities should not pose a challenge. This is a significant difference when juxtaposed with the church's historical reality where members were persuaded not to associate with non-COGOP members for the fear of doctrinal

contamination. Notwithstanding the positive response, most of the pastors expressed that they are very careful when engaging ecumenically and affirmed the point that Pentecostals in general, including the COGOP members, should be well trained and allowed to serve the Lord alongside other Christians.

#### What Do You Suggest That the COGOP Should Do to Improve Its Ecumenical Relationships and Presence in Jamaica?

A number of suggestions were made in response to this question by the participants, and those suggestions are as follows.

- COGOP pastors have not be trained to participate; therefore, a structure should be developed internationally or nationally to empower them in engaging ecumenically in national dialogue.
- Although there has been ecumenical progress internationally, especially in the area of theological education, it was observed that this is inadequate in changing the way members view the ecumenical presence of the church.
- The pastors should make sure that their congregants are informed of their ecumenical activities. Therefore, publication of these activities to the members is important.
- The COGOP should spearhead ecumenical initiatives and not wait to be invited to participate.
- The COGOP should utilize the media more to its advantage because it is not receiving reorganization from being a member of the JAFGC.

- The church should be more deliberate in how it instructs members; they must recognize that the kingdom is much bigger than the church.
- When invited to participate in forums to contribute to the national dialogue, its participation should be made public to the wider church body.
- Local churches should allocate funds for their pastor's ecumenical activities.
- Strengthen national presence in ecumenical activities.
- Seeing national leaders in ecumenical settings would send a strong message that the COGOP is involved in ecumenical activities.
- The COGOP needs to move to develop relationships with other church leaders, both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals.
- The COGOP needs to be more deliberate in its ecumenical activities and not just humbly remain in the background.

### **Conclusion**

The study has shown that there is a real perception among pastors of the COGOP that the church is not engaging sufficiently in ecumenical activities in Jamaica thus hampering its national presence. This is the sentiments of the pastors, even though they are having an ecumenical presence in their various communities. The pastors lament the ecumenical absence and see the church as being too self-absorbed and believe there is more the COGOP could accomplish should its leaders decide to step out into the public socioreligious sphere.

In the areas where the pastors demonstrate some amount of reluctance to engage ecumenically, this could be further analyzed as them being very cautious. Caution is a



feature of the COGOP Jamaica, and rightly so, because the church exists among a plethora of other denominations and independent churches. However, the caution expressed in fellowshiping with other pastors seems to be different when the pastors are on the other end of the spectrum, in that they are generally more willing to go to others than for others to come to them.

The study has unearthed that the COGOP should actively address the negative perception of its members on the national ecumenical stage. If the church addresses the issue by taking responsibility for its low-keyed posture, the way others see the church, both from outside and inside will likely be resolved. This is needed especially as the church members move into more affluence, and are eager to identify with a church, which like all modern organizations is on the cutting edge in their society.

## CHAPTER 5

### OUTCOMES

In the first chapter of this thesis-project, I took the time to explore the socio-religious environment in Jamaica and the need for unity among church leaders in order to tackle the social ills of the society. I made the point that the ecclesial landscape in Jamaica is complex with a myriad of churches contending for prominence and souls. As a Pentecostal, I was more interested in how this relates to this group, especially since Pentecostals have been accused of lacking a social conscience. Being a member of the Church of God of Prophecy I do understand to an extent the criticisms and the need for transformative actions by the COGOP that has not made the quality national impact it should over its many years of existence on the island.

The COGOP has been known as a reclusive church and practiced this ecclesiology for many decades. As a result, the church, though growing exponentially, with more than three hundred congregations, is still a relatively low-key organization. However, I have already extensively explained in chapter 1 that the church has changed its exclusivist stance and now embraces Christian unity, as Harold Hunter rightly observes.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the effect of this change is not being felt in the wider society and is causing concerns not just among the laity but also leaders who want to see their church more involved in the ecumenical life in the land. I happen to believe too that ecumenical relationships and presence are important as the society moves to be more inclusive, as the literature reviews in chapter 2 aptly depicts.

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<sup>1</sup> H. D. Hunter, "Church of God of Prophecy," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley Burgess and Ed van der Maas, rev. expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 540-41.

I therefore affirm my stance that ecumenical relationship is an important subject for theological reflection within the spiritual melee of the Jamaican society. The church is an expanding entity on the island bedeviled by myriads of socio-economic and socio-religious challenges, including poverty, crime, and violence. In this polarized environment, ecclesial unity is important, as a witness of the Christ the church preaches, and as a way to address many of the social ills that are becoming engrained in the society which is beckoning for a response from a united; incarnate church. The Jamaican church is encouraged to reflect on the question asked in the 1974 Lausanne Conference which questions the integrity of the message of the church as a united entity while remaining fragmented and unreconciled.<sup>2</sup>

As an ecumenically minded pastor, I am dissatisfied with the church's national ecumenical presence, which is almost nonexistent. Therefore, in the effort to unearth the issue affecting ecumenical relationships among leaders within the COGOP and their counterparts, I have engaged a sample of the pastoral leaderships in St. Catherine East, Jamaica, to develop my hypotheses. The results from the survey and focus group conducted have confirmed that the denomination has been trending away from its exclusivist past, but this shift is in need of a support mechanism.

This support mechanism should be implemented to move the church forward on the ecumenical stage and change its culture of disengagement. Undoubtedly, the COGOP is a spiritually mature church that has enjoyed a very good reputation in Jamaica, and it has progressed in many areas such as leadership development. However, in envisioning

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<sup>2</sup> T. P. Weber, "Ecumenism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 365.

its future, the church should bear in mind the outcomes from this process, and its leadership must consider a paradigm shift ecumenically.

### **Is Ecumenism Being Promoted by the Church of God of Prophecy?**

It is my view that the COGOP has been promoting ecumenism as is supported by the overwhelming response in the survey. The observations made in chapter 1 strongly suggest it, and in fact it is so. By its willingness to receive visiting clergy in their important gatherings, both locally and internationally, the church's expressed "passion for Christian union" is being implemented on one important level.<sup>3</sup> However, while there is agreement on the church's role in promoting ecumenism, there are complaints and dissents regarding the quality of the activities where other churches seek the involvement of the COGOP. Dissatisfaction abounds within the church because the ecumenical participation required of its leaders is limited mainly to events such as rallies and church crusades.

This level of involvement to which the pastors refer is not seen as beneficial to the COGOP, as it is more likely to cost them and their congregations to participate. A rally is an event designed to raise money for a local church's special projects. In a rally the visiting pastor and his or her congregation are targeted for specific sums of money. However, this practice is becoming untenable in the rural parts of the parish and is already nonexistent in the urban area. Regarding crusades, Jamaica is littered with churches, notwithstanding, the fact that church attendance is low. Therefore, the pastors' emphasis on increasing the population of their local church will inevitably receive

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<sup>3</sup> Church of God of Prophecy, "Vision 2020," accessed May 29, 2017, <http://cogop.org/about/vision2020/>.

priority attention. I must point out though that the church's leaders are usually invited to participate in other types of activities such as pastoral appreciation or installation services.

The information generated from the survey reveals that the ecumenical relationships are fragile because they lack perceived benefits. The COGOP must however be careful not to be upholding the criticism of self-interest made by Hunter, as I mentioned before.<sup>4</sup>

The argument that the COGOP is consulted and invited only to take advantage of its ability to pull large numbers of people together was strongly expressed throughout the discourse, and there is the view that the organization with its large numbers should reject this notion and go on its own; in other words, the church should pull out of the JAFGC. It is the feeling that although the church is pushing for ecumenical relations in Jamaica, the church does not seem to be receiving the requisite reciprocal response and should therefore take steps to disassociate itself from this kind of disrespect.

The observation is not only regarding the quality of events to which the COGOP is invited, but also exposed the discontent of the church with the absence of heads of churches from the national convention of 2017. It was observed that in the churches seventy-fifth national convention there were no elected officials or denominational heads who attended. I must emphasize at this point that in the past the church received political, civic, and church leaders in their conventions, to the delight of the members. However, when compared with the level of support to other denominations or even smaller churches, the disparity is very wide.

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<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, ed., *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Ecumenical Documents and Critical Assessments* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 24.

The problem, however, is not as one-sided as some may want to suggest. The COGOP should take full responsibility for its lack of ecumenical support. This is likely resulting from its historical isolated practice and withdrawing from ecumenicalism coupled with the lack of a mechanism to transfer it from its perceived isolated status to its actual embracing status—a suggestion I made before.

### **Beyond Rallies and Crusades**

It is commendable that leaders have convincingly expressed their willingness to share pulpits with other pastors and to preach in churches outside their own. It is not clear whether or not this means just Pentecostals or included non-Pentecostal churches as well. However, since most of them limit their relationships to pastors whose spirituality is like theirs, it can be determined that their main focus is on Pentecostal churches. However, the exclusivist mindset is not a problem that the church has to grapple with although it may not have been fully removed from their thoughts. Additionally, the General Assembly legally denounced its exclusivist ecclesiology at 91<sup>st</sup> General Assembly, but it has unwittingly been replaced by functional distance.

The limited position in ecumenical circles described earlier is not strange, but why? The observation was made before that the COGOP has benefitted from stable leadership over its ninety-five years in Jamaica; the integrity of its leadership is not in question. The national overseer, commenting on this, stated that while attending an ecumenical meeting he has discovered that the church's leadership is well respected in ecumenical circles. My experience validates this view, as I feel at ease when I am among other church leaders, although this could be attributed to self-confidence. However, this

idea is further supported by the overwhelmingly large percentage of the pastors who expressed no discomfort when they are among other pastors.

The answer to the limited ecumenical involvement that is concerning the pastors may be in part due to an experience I had many years ago. I remember attending a community meeting when I was asked in a group to introduce myself I told them I was a pastor in the COGOP. A member of the group responded to by saying, “Oh, it is one of the churches that doesn’t train their pastors and just take them from the congregation and make them into a pastor.” I was naturally disturbed by the utterance and proceeded to let her know that the COGOP trains their pastors before appointing them. Of course the matter of pastoral qualification has always been a debate in social stratification dialogue in Jamaica, not because of the value it gives to relieve human suffering and expand God’s kingdom but primarily because of its accentuating benefits to project one pastor above another. This perceived view that COGOP pastors are not trained is a possible reason for them being sidelined in ecumenical circles. Truly, classism and social stratification are still very strong in Jamaican society, and the church has not escaped its dominance.

I remind readers of the example of this ecumenical classism I alluded to before; one churchman who supported the repeal of Jamaica’s buggery law was rebuked by the head of his association, the Jamaica Evangelical Alliance (JEA), according to media reports. The *Daily Gleaner* reported that Garnet Roper, president of the Jamaica Theological Seminary (JTS) and supporter of the repeal of the buggery law, retorted to the rebuke of Alvin Bailey, president of the JEA, by saying Bailey “is in no position to counsel him as he is several years his senior in terms of ministry and considerably more well trained.” Roper continued by saying, “These are people who are weak

intellectually.”<sup>5</sup> I must add that these are not two Pentecostal pastors, but the crassness make me wonder what would Roper say about a pastor from the COGOP who may be less educated than Bailey.

I pointed out in the previous chapter that although the COGOP leaders are comfortable in relating to other church leaders, this is not as evident to the onlookers as it is to them. In fact, the focus group highlights that the church leaders need to assert themselves more than they do now. The majority of the pastors who see doctrinal indifferences as the major impediment to relating ecumenically have limited themselves to a narrow circle; hence my point that they are likely thinking about Pentecostal ecumenical relationships mainly as the benchmark for their comfort. I believe that the pastoral preoccupation with doctrine as a main issue for avoiding ecumenical relationships is a practice to avoid anything where they tend not to have control. This was alluded to by Stanley M. Burgess in his report on the Pentecostal World Conference of 1947.<sup>6</sup>

I am therefore suggesting that although the pastors do not see themselves as unqualified to engage ecumenically, and cite doctrinal challenges as an area of ecumenical contention, if they were better educated theologically then doctrinal indifference will not be so important to them. The capacity of the pastors of the COGOP needs to be significantly improved to take advantage of the opportunities of the changing times within the Jamaican socio-religious reality. This is a small country of approximately 2.8 million inhabitants with a complex religious climate, but the role

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<sup>5</sup> Ryon Jones, “Roper Under Fire—Buggery Stance Could Cost Prominent Churchman His Place in Evangelicals’ Group,” *The Gleaner*, July 30, 2017, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20170730/roper-under-fire-buggery-stance-could-cost-prominent-churchman-his>.

<sup>6</sup> Stanley M. Burgess and Ed van der Maas, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 970.



religion plays in the ordering of the society presents the clergy with opportunities for societal impact. It is when leaders are well developed that they will become more socially aware and thus better engaged in ecumenical activities beyond their comfort zones. The debate between Roper and Bailey is evidence of the need for balanced social debate by well-informed church leaders whose mission is God's and not his or her own.

As I pointed out before, the COGOP has been actively addressing theological education. Over the past ten years the church has been partnering with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to upgrade its leaders in a formal seminary setting. This is a deliberate strategy from the international office of the church to complement its seminar-type training with more structured and potentially recognized credential for its leaders. In Jamaica, not only have they taken advantage of the partnership with GCTS, but also the church has been working to improve the NCBI. This is being done by offering expanded training geared at equipping new ministers and leaders with the tools to engage within the wider church body.

It is therefore important for me to also point out that the push to unity by the church is bearing fruit with an increasing number of their leaders who are involved in their local Ministers' Fraternal, though this is still low. It is however better when compared with the period of Lesmon Graham's leadership, when he was unable to convince his colleagues to join the JAFGC in the 1970s. The COGOP is a member of the association, and the meetings are being attended by a few pastors, as well as the national overseer. It is explicitly clear that the COGOP cannot work in silo notwithstanding its large membership. Therefore, it is incumbent on its leaders to continue on this path of increasing ecumenical relationships by making the relevant changes to its structure.

### **Bi-vocational Pastors and the COGOP**

In addressing the changes needed within the COGOP, one of the areas that came to light as a deterrent to ecumenical involvement of some pastors is the significant numbers of bi-vocational pastors. From observation, more than 60% of the pastors who participated in the survey are bi-vocational, while a few others are in full-time pastoral ministry because they have retired from their work and some are unable to find permanent stable employment. Consequently, it leaves a minority who has made ministry their primary vocation. This is the reason why even to conduct the survey proved to be so challenging, and the focus group had to be held in the night to facilitate the pastors who were willing to participate. Events conducted by the church for pastors have to be held on weekends or in the night to facilitate the vast numbers of bi-vocational pastors.

To the contrary, most of the ecumenical activities are held during work hours; these events seldom happen on weekends. For the obvious reason, the weekend is reserved for individual churches to meet and have their activities. Within the month of January, for instance, there were three ecumenical activities locally, and in all cases they were held during the week in the day time. Therefore, pastors who are employed in 9-to-5 jobs will find it more difficult to participate in these activities even if they wanted to do so. Although bi-vocational status did not receive much attention by the pastors, I have observed that those who are in full-time pastoral work support ecumenical activities more than their bi-vocational counterparts.

I am not against pastors being bi-vocational, because many of the local churches are unable to financially support their pastors and their families. The reality is that many

of the pastors have expressed their desire to work full time as a pastor but are unwilling or unable to make that decision because of the economic implications for them and their families. Consequently, although it is accepted that ecumenism is a biblical concept, should they be required to choose between being available ecumenically and an action to support their families, the natural choice will be the latter. The church also has to overcome the ethos of a large body of the membership who believe that the church should not compensate their pastor. The point was made that ecumenical activities need to be financed by the church and not the pastors.

### **Belief Must Impact Action**

From the response to the survey in chapter 4, there is no doubt that amid the doctrinal, administrative, or social challenges affecting ecumenism in Jamaica, it is endorsed by the Scriptures. This is a position arrived at by the major movements that have been formed over many decades. The truth is, although the word *ecumenism* has not appeared in the Bible, the concept is replete throughout Scripture. The church understands this principle and has been clear in its stance to embrace other Christians as members of the body of Christ. Notwithstanding this admission by the COGOP, it is felt that there is no structure to ensure that the belief is put into action. In this regard, even those who are trained seem to lack a reference point concerning how to engage ecumenically.

For the biblical precepts of ecumenism to be obeyed, the concept must be transmitted from the pages of Scripture and activated in the community. In other words, one's orthodoxy must also become one's orthopraxy. It is unlikely that the myriad of

churches across the world will have doctrinal harmony in the foreseeable future. The fact is with more independent churches springing up and complicating the ecclesial landscape, is the more elusive doctrinal harmony will become. In Jamaica, the independent charismatic movement is flourishing, sometimes to the loss of the traditional and classical Pentecostal churches as members move freely from one church to the next. In some cases the new church is formed by a leader of another church who divides that church and co-opts some of the members for himself or herself to establish the new church nearby.

In all this there is an emerging church culture being led by the independent church movement: the designation of apostles and prophets is increasingly popular. The COGOP does not believe in the ordination of either apostles or prophets, yet persons who designate themselves as such are received by them in their churches. It is these acclaimed apostles and prophets who are gaining more notoriety in the dynamic Jamaican church culture. Admittedly, this is not a reality of Jamaica only but across the world as Pentecostalism continues its spread. In this regard it is important to reflect on Joe Aldridge's appeal to Pentecostals to pursue spiritual maturity, as was mentioned in chapter 2 of this thesis-project.<sup>7</sup>

As was mentioned earlier, the COGOP has demonstrated a significant level of maturity in how they have articulated their views concerning sharing their pulpits with other pastors outside their own denomination. This is not without caution, though, and rightly so given the new doctrines that accompanies the new church culture. I also recall my experience growing up as an Anglican who was wooed by the appearance of a new church in my community, so I can readily identify with the caution expressed by the

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<sup>7</sup> Phyllis Thompson, ed., *Challenges of Black Pentecostal Leadership in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013), 22.

church that may view some of these prophets and apostles with suspicion.

Unity will be more likely to happen where there is spiritual maturity. It is spiritual maturity that must guide the efforts of the church in Jamaica in its ecumenical pursuits. Thankfully, this is happening, as observed by Las Newman pointing to the work of the JUGC.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, in an effort to arrive at Christian unity, there have been many initiatives over many years exemplified in the formation of different organizations. The Jamaica Umbrella Group of Churches (JUGC) was organized in an effort to assemble all representative church groups on the island together. It is however important to note here that the JUGC has been able to accomplish some important socio-religious outcomes. These include uniting the churches in the resistance to the repeal of the buggery law in Jamaica, petitioning of the prime minister to call a national time of prayer, and the government's consultation with church leaders on the implementation of the National Identification System. Therefore, the church's approach toward unity is serving at least one important purpose, which is to give access to the political directorate for dialogue and consultation with the wider church body through this united leadership structure.

With this approach of governmental entities and other nonprofit organizations working primarily through the JUGC, churches like the COGOP that are not actively involved in this organization are at risk of being isolated further from important national ecumenical dialogues, thus fulfilling what Michael Manley alluded to, as was mentioned in chapter 2.<sup>9</sup> For instance, each year there is an annual National Leadership Prayer Breakfast including leaders from the church, civil society, the business community, and

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<sup>8</sup> Garnet Roper et al., *Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology; Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 151.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Kasafi Perkins, *Justice as Equality: Michael Manley's Caribbean Vision of Justice*, American University Studies, Series VII, Theology and Religion, vol. 309 (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 49, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10517055>.

politics, yet within the past ten years, the national overseer of the COGOP was invited to attend only twice. This included 2017, after both members and leaders complained that the church was being ignored and sidelined in the event.

The COGOP must, however, accelerate actions that will activate their belief and utterances and not be unwilling or afraid to tackle their socio-religious landscape. This can be done by articulating a position on the pressing national social issues which are affecting its society and making it known.

### **COGOP Ecumenical Introspection**

There is no question regarding the prominence of large denominations in Jamaican society, but not so with the COGOP. Although the COGOP is among the large denominations, it has to work much harder to gain recognition than some of the older and larger denomination, and even some of the newer ones. In addition to historical fear of ecumenism, as was observed before, its moderate socio-economic status has no doubt contributed to its ecumenical posture. Although this status is improving gradually, the majority of the members are still from the lower socio-economic classes. This was a claim made by Dian Austin-Broos to which I also referred before.<sup>10</sup>

The socio-economic reality of the COGOP has also placed it at a disadvantageous position with regards to its national presence. Unlike some of the other churches they do not have the institutional capacity required for the social impact that can move it onto the front line. In addition, the church operates a loose financial system which significantly limits the amount of cash available for national projects. Therefore, it depends on the

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<sup>10</sup> Diane J. Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 81.

local churches to carry out its social actions and engage the community. However, with the rate of their pastors who have little or no time for ecumenical activities, this will hardly be significant enough to change the fortune of the church ecumenically.

Since the COGOP does not possess the high number of pastors with theological degrees like others, it will have to be strategic to improve its national presence. This is also not the same with the older denominations such as the Anglican, Baptist, and Roman Catholic churches; they have already made an impact on national life by their longevity and prominence in the country. Regarding the Seventh Day Adventists, they are expanding in many ways at a rapid rate across the island. These are all churches with members occupying very prominent positions in the society; for instance, Jamaica's head of state, the representative of Queen Elizabeth II, the Governor General, is an ardent Seventh Day Adventist.

When I observe the prominence of the other churches and the way they have been able to affect the society compared with the COGOP, the reaction of the pastors is not surprising to me. It was this question addressing the national presence of the COGOP that generated the most strident responses. In this regard, they still believe that the vestiges of the exclusivist past have not been completely erased. As far as the pastors are concerned, there is no reason why the denomination's leaders should not be more prominent in ecumenical activities other than that. This meant that although ecumenism is localized, they want to see it nationalized.

The view was expressed that since the COGOP has a good message and a good structure, and that its leadership is well respected; it has something to offer to the wider church body. They pointed to media reports within the past year of a myriad of pastors

who have sadly been dragged before the courts because of sexual misconduct, but yet none of the 305 pastors in the COGOP were included. It was pointed out that this is not to celebrate the failure of any group of pastors, but it was made as an observation. The COGOP continues to pray for pastors and their families, as well as the victims of abuse. Another observation that was made related to the stability of the church over its ninety-five years of existence in Jamaica. This is a point that is worth repeating.

In continuation of the arguments for a change toward ecumenism, it was also observed that efforts are being made in this direction by pointing to the attendance of the national overseer at the 2018 National Leadership Prayer Breakfast, and participating in the consultation regarding the National Identification System, but this is not considered sufficient. It was felt that the leadership of the church should therefore be more proactive when participating in ecumenical activities and that the capacity of the church should be improved to build a public relations structure around its senior officers to accomplish this.

### **Conclusion**

The call for unity among church leaders is a greater need today than before, not only because the Lord's coming is imminent, but also the events shaping up for his return are happening speedily. The world in which the church lives and witness is seeing its Judeo-Christian values eroded with the pervasive secular culture. There is a growing intolerance of Christianity's supremacy and a greater push toward religious inclusivity, especially in the Western world. However, if Christian leaders, and in particular leaders



in the COGOP, are incapable of working together, there is little hope that they will be able to work with leaders from other faith-based organizations.

It is widely believed that the Bible strongly supports ecumenism, as I have shown in chapter 3. From the dawn of the Old Testament unto the closing moments of Revelation, we see God working to unite the human family under the supreme banner of love. Jesus' prayer in John 17 is the central text used in the argument for unity among his followers. However, even prior to this prayer we see the unity of the Godhead at work in creation. Christian unity is therefore a theme that must be echoed from the pulpits of our churches instead of divisive language which dishonors the Lord and weakens the witness of the church in these challenging times.

It has been established in the theological review that sin entered God's creation and the divine order was disrupted, making way for a culture of divisiveness among humans. This culture has permeated human relationships, both within and without the religious community; in fact the religious community is among the most divisive of all places of socialization. This is demonstrated by the claims and counterclaims of various religious entities concerning who is the holder of truths as shown by the doctrinal concerns earlier. In this melee of religious and social upheavals, the church has essentially played little role to seek to unify the human family as it is fraught with divisions and factions mainly over doctrinal and administrative matters.

Peter Staple's call for a unified approach to ecumenism by encouraging Pentecostals to be at the table is worth listening to.<sup>11</sup> Surely, the church has made strides

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<sup>11</sup> Jerry L. Sandidge, "An Update on the Ecumenical Activities of Pentecostals," in *Experience of the Spirit: Conference on Pentecostal and Charismatic Research in Europe at Utrecht University, 1989*, ed. Jon A. B. Jongeneel, vol. 68 of *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991), 260.

in seeking to build consensus on less contentious issues, and this has been done through different intrachurch dialogues over many decades. However, this has not been easy as groups like Pentecostals have given half-hearted support to ecumenical activities citing their brand of spirituality as being superior, as was mentioned in chapter 2.<sup>12</sup> However, non-Pentecostals have historically branded Pentecostals as fanatical in their approach to worship and less than qualified for spiritual engagement.

The COGOP, being a leading Pentecostal church, has contributed to the anti-ecumenical culture with its exclusivist doctrine; however, the church has consistently been moving from that past and is now a more integrated church. In the Jamaican context they are lagging behind in ecumenical relationships, an ethos which is causing discomfort among their members and leaders alike. This is happening even as the church confesses that there are no administrative or doctrinal impediments in their official practice that preclude their participation.

As the church seeks to solidify its position in Jamaica amid the changing ecclesial environment it cannot continue to operate in silo. Consequently, there have to be changes that will make its national presence more acceptable to its membership, which is moving up on the social ladder. In this regard, there are some suggestions which were generated from the study that I will like to include in my recommendations to the church to improve the nature of its ecumenical relationship.

There are five specific outcomes that I have identified from the survey that I will enumerate at this point. I will also offer other recommendations while expanding on these later.

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<sup>12</sup> Sandidge, "An Update on the Ecumenical Activities of Pentecostals," 240.

1. The survey has determined that the effort of the COGOP to promote ecumenism is accomplishing that.
2. Although the nature of the church's ecumenical relationship has improved over the past three or four decades, the result shows that this involvement is being limited to activities such as rallies and crusades, thus questioning the quality of the engagement.
3. One of the observations is also that pastors do not have the time to attend to ecumenical activities; this is partly because of the high number of bi-vocational pastors that the church has. However, it was further expressed that although the pastors would like to be available; their economic reality dictates that they must remain bi-vocational.
4. An important outcome from the survey is that the church must act more decisively on ecumenical matters instead of always playing second fiddle.
5. Finally, the survey revealed that the pastors have very high regard for the COGOP and want to see the church put itself on display more convincingly and take its place as one of the large Pentecostal churches on the island.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were arrived at after reflections from the church's historical past and its efforts to transition from being exclusive to embracing all followers of Christ. Included in these recommendations will be my reflections. Another important contributor to the recommendations is the feedback from the survey cited in chapter 4. The recommendations are as follows.

1. The COGOP should seek to build on the positive position revealed in the survey concerning its encouragement toward ecumenical relationships by continuing to encourage its leaders to join their fraternal and the JAFGC. In doing this the church must be mindful not to act in a manner that could cause its members to become disloyal to it. One approach that they can take is to promote the church as an active and credible entity engaging in the work of the kingdom and existing alongside other partners in the process. So education of its members and leaders is critical.

2. The second outcome speaks to the discomfort with the limited ecumenical involvement of the church. It should therefore identify ways and systems where its leaders can play a more leading or convincing role. One of the suggestions made is that instead of waiting to being invited to participate in ecumenical activities, the church should plan ecumenical activities. Although the church has large numbers of national events, these are geared mainly toward its members. The new approach would not be the same as planning an event to which other church leaders are simply invited, but rather to develop a new brand along with other church leaders where the COGOP will be seen as playing a leading or facilitating role. These could be events for believers, to advance social justice or evangelism such as behavioral modification camps on its camp ground.

3. Making time for ecumenical engagements is one of the areas that the church needs to address. In this regard they should move toward increasing the cadre of pastors who are full-time. Naturally this is more easily said than done since the church's financial system is not capable of maintaining that structure presently. However, the church could start this process by a policy that its stronger local churches should be served by someone who is serving the organization full-time. In such a case the pastor will not be in a rigid

9-to-5 environment as when the individual is employed in the secular economy. It should also not be expected that pastors do the work of the church on their employer's time and remain credible to their flock and the unbelieving community.

My personal ecumenical engagement has been enhanced by the fact that I work for the church on a full-time basis, failing which I would be unable to participate in many of the activities I do now, so I can clearly see how this would help the church in its pursuit for recognition in the ecumenical community.

4. The church should act more decisively when it comes to ecumenical activities. In this regard they should train their leaders how to engage other church leaders. It was also determined that the church leadership needs always to have a commanding presence and not be satisfied with being in the background. In this regard a public relations system should be established around the office of the national overseer, who is the main face of the church in Jamaica. This public relation system would have the responsibility to liaise with other churches when the national overseer is visiting and to keep the nation updated with the ecumenical activities of the church through its leader.

5. In making a more convincing ecumenical presence in Jamaica, which is the target of the fifth outcome, the church has plenty of work to do in accomplishing this. As was mentioned before, the other large denominations on the island are engaged in not only building churches but other types of institutions and services as well. These include

- a. schools
- b. universities
- c. seminaries
- d. hospitals

- e. clinics
- f. teachers' colleges
- g. cemeteries
- h. Bible schools

However, this is not the case with the COGOP. It owns none of those types of institutions except for a small kindergarten school with an enrollment of twenty students at the time of this research. The church owns and operates its camp and retreat center, but this will not provide the national recognition that it requires. Therefore, institutional capacity should be a main focus if they intend to affect the national ecumenical landscape.

As it is now the church is struggling to maintain a consortium arrangement with GCTS because of lack of support by the leadership. Its localized training program offered by the NCBI is also in need of increased institutional capacity, such as a building, library, faculty, and finances. Within the curriculum of the NCBI the ecumenical training could be incorporated, as well as a chaplaincy program that focuses on equipping full-time pastors to become chaplains of schools, police stations, hospitals, and so on.

6. This other recommendation is very important to me, as I consider it a main area of need in the COGOP. The church does not appear to believe in the ministry as a vocation; it is not attracting the brightest and most talented members who can articulate in ecumenical discourse to serve as pastors. In this regard the church should begin to implement a program that will produce a paradigm shift from the mindset which views the ministry as something one does on the side.

Attracting more talented people will not likely be without its resistance from the establishment; however, it is very important. The church needs well-rounded people who can articulate on different subjects, both theologically and sociologically, to represent it on the national stage. It does not lack talented members, but those members are not interested in the pastoral ministry of the church.

7. Another area that I wish to highlight in this menu of recommendation is the training of pastors. It is commendable the work that the church has done in this area, but it is in need of stronger support. The current stock of pastors should be encouraged to access additional training specifically geared to making them more politically, economically, and socially aware. Hence the theological education now being offered by the NCBI should be expanded in this regard.

8. Capacity building—the church is in the process of seeking accreditation from the University Council of Jamaica for its NCBI, but this is an intense process that will take a long time to accomplish. Nonetheless, they must stay focused to getting this done since it will add to the intuitional capacity that the church requires to help in its ecumenical national presence.

The professionalizing of the pastoral ministry of the COGOP is a need that they should pay immediate attention to as they grapple with the changing socio-religious environment in Jamaica. It also needs to forge stronger partnerships, both locally and internationally, to assist in carrying its mandate for evangelization. This will help to modernize its systems and build the capacity it requires for a twenty-first century Christian institution.

While the COGOP is moving toward the professionalization of its pastoral ministry, this must be done not just for national recognition but to enable the church to better answer the call to demonstrate the unity of the church by continuing to support other ecumenical activities. As I mentioned before, the programs that are rolling out from the government and other state agencies are more interested in organized groups of churches rather than a single denomination.

The COGOP is a believer in ecumenical relationship, and as such every effort should be made to move it onto the national ecumenical stage as it joins hands with others for the advancement of God's kingdom in the lives of people.



APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

In fulfillment of the completion of my Doctor of Ministry program, please answer the following questions to the best of your ability by circling one of response that best suits you. Please do not write your name on the form.

1. Ecumenism is promoting unity among church organizations is this being promoted COGOP?  
**A strongly agree, B agree, C strongly disagree D. Disagree E. neutral**
2. Do you think you should fellowship with ministers from other denominations  
**A strongly agree, B agree, C strongly disagree D. Disagree E. neutral**
3. Do you feel that another minister from another organization should preach in your Church?  
**A strongly agree, B agree, C strongly disagree D. Disagree E. neutral**
4. Would you preach in another church organization?  
**A strongly agree, B agree, C strongly disagree D. Disagree E. neutral**
5. Would you feel comfortable preaching in another church organization?  
**A strongly agree, B agree, C strongly disagree D. Disagree E. neutral**
6. Do you feel that you are qualified to relate to other church leaders?  
**A strongly agree, B agree, C strongly disagree D. Disagree E. neutral**
7. Does the Church of God of Prophecy encourage ecumenical relationship?  
**A strongly agree, B agree, C strongly disagree D. Disagree E. neutral**
8. Does the bible teach about ecumenism?  
**A strongly agree, B agree, C strongly disagree D. Disagree E. neutral**
9. Do you believe that the Holy Spirit sanctions ecumenical relationship?  
**A strongly agree, B agree, C. strongly disagree D. disagree, E. neutral**
10. Do you believe that the COGOP is well represented in ecumenical activities?  
**A strongly agree, B agree, C. strongly disagree D. disagree, E. neutral**
11. Have you ever heard the term “ecumenical or ecumenism” before?  
**A yes, or, B no?**

**Briefly answer the following questions. (Please write clearly)**

12. State briefly whether or not you consider ecumenism to be important.

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13. How would you describe your personal ecumenical relationship within your community, i.e. are you a member of any Christian groups other than your church.

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14. What would prevent you from fellowshiping with another minister from another church denomination?

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15. Explain briefly how you feel when you are among church leaders from another denomination.

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## APPENDIX B

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

The following questions form the basis for this focus group discussion. The finding of these discussions will form a vital part of my DMin thesis-project.

1. Explore the COGOP's involvement or lack of it in ecumenical activities in Jamaica.
2. Explore the psychological impediments and perceived socioeconomic inadequacies that you believe are affecting the involvement of Pentecostal leaders in ecumenical activities.
  - a. Explain how you believe the leaders of the COGOP are specifically impacted by these realities.
3. What role do doctrinal beliefs play in the way Pentecostal leaders engaged ecumenically?
4. What do you suggest that the Church can do to improve its ecumenical relationship in Jamaica?

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**PROJECT TITLE:** PASTORAL LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS IN JAMAICA: A CASE STUDY OF CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY'S PASTORS IN ST. CATHERINE EAST, JAMAICA

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Junior R. Headlam, Doctor of Ministry- Global Pentecostalism.

**PURPOSE**

This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is designed to explore "Pastoral Leadership Challenges in Ecumenical Relationships in Jamaica. Ecumenism is "the organized approach to bring about the cooperation and unity of all believers."<sup>1</sup>

It involves both a questionnaire and a focus group. All pastors are being asked to answer all the questions on the questionnaire as truthfully as possible and a few persons are being asked to participate in the focus group.

The information you provide will be helpful for the church as a whole to improve the impact of the COGOP in ecumenical activities. The expectations are for you to think about your understanding of the subject and to look at it in a wider sense.

The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear.

We are inviting you to participate in this research study because the study involves all the pastors in COGOP in St. Catherine East of which you are apart.

The following procedures are involved in this study. You will be asked to answer all questions on the questionnaire choosing anyone of the designations [SD strongly Disagree, D Disagree N Neutral A Agree SA Strongly Agree]. Those in the focus group there will be a moderator, questions will be posed and we want free participation and you

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<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 343.

to share from your heart. You will not be judged or criticized, feel free to express yourselves as we want to hear your story.

### **RISKS**

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this research project.

### **BENEFITS**

The potential personal benefits that may occur as a result of your participation in this study are, you may want to further improve your involvement in ecumenical activities and encourage your colleagues to do the same. In the future our church may benefit as at the present time although it have such large following the church is relatively very low-keyed and not widely known nationally.

### **COMPENSATION**

You could request a copy of my findings which may inform your future relationships with other church leaders both nationally and locally.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. When analyzing data there will be no personal identification mark, note you are not required to write your name on the questionnaire. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. If you however, have started and decided to withdraw I will ask for your consent to use what you have already done. You are at liberty to refuse using that data if you withdraw.

### **QUESTIONS**

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Junior R. Headlam Cel. 876-3103666 email: j2edlam@yahoo.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Co-Chair of the Institutional Review Board, David A. Currie, at: dcurrie@gordonconwell.edu; 978-646-4176

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